

“(He) was moved with compassion at the sight.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, a woman was standing on a curb, waiting for the light to say, ‘Walk.’ Directly across the street, on the opposite curb, was a girl of about 17. She, too, was waiting for the light to say, ‘Walk.’

The woman couldn’t help but notice that the girl was crying. In fact, her grief was so great that she made no effort to hide it.

For a moment, their eyes met. It was only a fleeting glance, but it was enough for the woman to see the terrible pain that filled the girl’s eyes. Quickly, the girl looked away.

At that moment, the light changed. Each stepped off the curb into the street and started to cross.

As the girl approached, the woman could see that she was quite pretty, except for the terrible grief in her face.

Just as they were about to meet, the woman’s motherly instincts came rushing to the surface. Every part of her wanted to reach out and comfort the girl. The desire was all the more great because she was about the same age as one of her own daughter’s.

BUT ...the woman passed her by. She didn’t even greet her. She just ...passed her by!

Hours later, the pain-filled eyes of that girl continued to haunt the woman. Over and over, the woman said to herself:

“Why didn’t I turn, fall in-step with her, and say, ‘Honey, can I help you?’ BUT ...I didn’t. I walked on by. Sure, she might have rejected me and thought me a nosey person. But, so what! Only a few seconds would have been lost, but those few seconds would have been enough to let her know that someone cared. Instead, I ...walked ...by! I acted as if she didn’t even exist!”

That true story illustrates, as few stories can, the point Jesus makes in today’s Gospel, which I/the deacon just read to you from St. Luke.

‘What, exactly, is the point that Jesus makes in today’s Gospel’ you ask?

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

It is this: It takes so little to reach out compassionately to someone who is hurting!

To appreciate Jesus’ parable even better than at first reading, a little background will help.

The road that provides the setting for Jesus’ parable is not an imaginary one. In fact, it is a very famous road. It was the only one, in ancient times, that went from Jerusalem to Jericho. At times, it twisted around huge boulders. As a result, it was a favorite haunt for robbers and outlaws.

An extant letter, from 171 A.D., complains to the authorities about the crime being committed along the road. There are historical records of travelers who paid ‘protection money’ to local thugs to insure ‘safe passage’ over the road!

It is this infamous road that provided Jesus with the realistic setting for his parable of the Good Samaritan.

In the parable, Jesus paints the portraits for us of three different people:

A priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan.

1st, the priest: He was probably on his way to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. Apparently, he thought the bleeding man by the side of the road was dead. This explains why he ‘walked by.’

You see, if a priest touched a dead man, he became ‘ritually unclean’ and was, temporarily, banned from the Temple. So, this may explain why the priest chose not to ‘get involved.’

2nd, the Levite: He was something like a modern-day deacon. It’s not really clear as to why he ‘walked by.’ Perhaps his reason was the same as the priest’s. Perhaps, he feared the man was ‘faking it’ and would attack him as he leaned over to help. So, for whatever reason, the Levite chose not to ‘get involved.’

3rd, the Samaritan: Making a Samaritan the hero of his parable would have shocked Jesus’ listeners. They typically ‘shunned’ Samaritans as renegades, who compromised their faith. Consequently, Samaritans were banned from the Temple. Even their contributions were refused! Their testimony was not accepted in a court of law. (Talk about being ‘Archie Bunker-intolerant!’)

Regardless, Jesus knew what he was doing by making a Samaritan the hero of his story. He wanted to teach his Jewish hearers that ‘true love’ knows no boundaries. Love reaches out to anyone in need. It doesn’t ‘walk by.’ It stops to help; it ‘gets involved,’ regardless of who the person is!

And THAT brings us back to the woman and the weeping-girl in my opening story. It would have been so easy for the woman to reach out and help the girl ...at least to offer! As the woman said:

“Only a few seconds would have been lost, but, those few seconds would have been enough to let her know that someone cared.”

And, often, just knowing that ...is all a grief-stricken person really needs. Often what they need is not a great expenditure of our energy, nor a great expenditure of our time, nor a great expenditure of our money. Often, all they need is simply a sign ...that we care!

So, in conclusion: today’s parable invites us to ask ourselves a very simple question:

How do I respond to people in need? Do I turn around, fall in step with them, and offer help? Or do I ‘walk by,’ pretending they don’t even exist?

Do we do this, especially, to the members of our own family? It’s a sad fact of life that we, sometimes, treat needy strangers better than members of our own family! –our own needy ...spouse... parents... siblings... or children.

Today’s parable does **NOT** invite us to go risk our lives, pick-up every would-be hitchhiker, and become heroes. It invites us to **‘reach out,’** risk our pride, and be ‘human!’ It invites us to ask,

“Can I help?”

I now close with this prayer:

“Lord, give us eyes to see the pain in other people’s eyes, especially in members of our own family. Lord, give us ears to hear the cry in other people’s voices, especially in those of our own flesh and blood. Lord, give us compassion to become involved in other people’s needs, especially in the needs of our own loved ones. Lord, give us humility never to ‘walk by’ because we fear rejection. Rather, give us courage to reach out and ask, **‘Can I help?’”**

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.