

Homily for the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C), 13th/14th July 2013

In order to gain eternal life we must love God and our neighbour – this is the basic Christian wisdom about life. To live life fully, it says, is to love.

And whom should we love? Well, says the story of the Good Samaritan, everybody. Let us take a closer look at “everybody”. It means everybody but it also means that we should love different people differently and not all in the same way.

I must try to love my family, both my natural family and my own family, if I have one, of partner and children. This is a special sort of loving – it is intimate and profound and at the very centre of one’s existence. All of us are called to this kind of intimate relationship in which all our virtues are at the same time called into play and being challenged to grow. Our patience is tested as is our willingness to be generous with our time and money. Our pride is challenged and we will have many opportunities to grow in humility.

Then there are our friends to love. We don’t just neglect them when we move into an intimate relationship, but these friends assume a different priority and place in our lives. We can find a different sort of support from friends than from our families, and our friends can call from us reserves of loving that we didn’t know we had, in which we can sacrifice ourselves to give them what they most need.

Widening the circle of our loving, we are called to support those who are not our friends or acquaintances but are the needy and the poor. This is the sort of loving offered so unstintingly by the Good Samaritan. He didn’t know the man on the road to Jericho; his heart didn’t suddenly melt with love at first sight; it wasn’t something he was looking for or particularly wanted. Looked at cynically you could say he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But something in him went out in love. What was it? Concern, pity, compassion. Empathy? Was it, perhaps something in him which suggested that the man robbed and beaten could have been him? All these factors came into play with the Samaritan I am sure, as they do with us when we see cases of great need today.

Yesterday Fr. Paul entertained members of the Passage to a day at Worth. This is the Cardinal Hume Centre in London for those who are homeless. They were

having a day in the country with lunch thrown in by way of a respite from their daily grind of the streets of London. I can say and maybe you can too: “There but for the grace of God go I”. I remember difficult times of precarious living in London, before I joined the monastery, though, thankfully, I never suffered being out of work and in absolute poverty, without the possibility of a bed for the night. But it could quite easily have come to that for me.

And my trip, especially this year to our Friendship parish in Irundu, Uganda. I cycled around the rural parish in the afternoons suddenly coming across a clearing with a group of mud huts and people living there without the amenities we depend on – water, electricity, furniture and modern sanitation. It is a primitive hand-to-mouth existence in which surviving is the complete focus of living. And certainly for me in this particular case, my heart went out to them, as it would all of us, and I wanted to do something really effective to relieve the poverty and make the search for eternal life a reality for them. (Things of the spirit demand a certain level of subsistence to have any relevance.)

So who is my neighbour? Everybody, but all in different ways. My love for my family and friends is different from my love for the homeless and those in Irundu, but both are essential for us to find eternal life. Let us allow the Lord into our lives to inspire us to action so that we can love the Lord Our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind and our neighbour as ourselves.