

The Good Samaritan Commentaries

Commentary 1 Jesus refuses boundaries

'The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates the contrast between two different conceptions of the moral life. The first is seen in the behaviour of the priest and the Levite. When they come across the man left beaten by robbers they both pass by on the other side of the road, fearing that he might already be dead. Both wanted to be obedient to the Jewish law, in this case the purity law which restricted contact with a corpse. But out of fear of violating an obligation imposed by the law, they failed to put into practice the heart of the law.

'Their conduct can be contrasted with the behaviour of the Samaritan traveller who, moved with pity at the sight of a fellow human being in need, acts with spontaneity and resourcefulness.

'Jesus refuses to answer this question in terms of identifying boundaries which separate neighbour from non-neighbour, whether these boundaries are defined by faith, national identity or special election by God. Now my neighbour is the first person I encounter who constitutes a claim on my love. At the same time it is in the person in need that I encounter Jesus Christ who identifies himself, in particular, with the lowly and the suffering.'

- Excerpt from a homily by Fr Thomas Skeats OP

Commentary 2 The Jewish Law – preparatory education

'The violence we see so often these days on our television screens can help us to understand how bitter the antagonism between Jews and Samaritans was. Jesus gives the story an added edge for his interrogator, so well versed in the Law: the priest and the Levite – probably hurrying home to Jericho after completing their temple duties – pass on the other side, to avoid the possibility of ritual impurity.

'Jesus does not scorn the Law; he is a faithful observer of the Law himself; but his story illustrates the fact that the Law was only a preparatory education for the fulfilment that is to take place in his own person – as he gathers all the peoples of the world into the one family of his heavenly Father. He fulfils all that the Law looks forward to; bringing the New Commandment that knows no exclusive limits: 'You must love one another just as I have loved you'.

'The parable challenges us to reflect upon our own attitudes. We all become indignant at the religious antagonisms that show their ugliness in today's world. But what is the quality of our good will to those who are different from us (ethnically, culturally, and socially); are we ready to show that good will in a practical way?'

- Excerpt from a reflection by Fr John Thornhill sm