

The royal virtue. (Luk 10:25-37).

* Dear Friends, each Sunday we gather at the church for certain purposes. They may be classified as self-centered and community-centered purposes. The self-centered purpose communicates the idea of seeking and receiving the benefits from God through the means of grace. On the other hand, the community-centered purpose is about offering ourselves for the needs of others. Playing with the first concept, we may identify ourselves with the Israelites surrounded by the venomous snakes in the wilderness. The snakes trouble us constantly while we remain in the wilderness. But if we are plagued with them we have the privilege to cry for help, *Moses, help! help!* Moses in turn cry too, *Oh Lord, have mercy on us, please remove the serpents.* The merciful God rewards us in a double degree by giving an ear to Moses and a “bronze serpent” to us. In effect, anyone who looks at that phenom with faith shall be saved. In a like manner, the second concept can be approached as well. In this case, we identify ourselves with a rescue team in a sailing boat that heads through the storm toward a man crying with the most pleading tone, *Help, Help!* Fortunately, we arrive in time or the person would have hit the bottom. Immediately we give our hand and get the pitiful man in the boat out of the cold deep water.

* As you can see, the two concepts about our purposes for gathering at the church can be explained plainly or in veiled language. Which way of saying it do you prefer? As a matter of fact, some artists use to communicate the ideas in symbolic language, me too. Of course not all artistic inventions can be understood either, sometimes due to the hyper symbolism such as Nostradamus’ quatrains or because of the lack of our knowledge about a subject. For example, let’s recall the national idea pictured as a two sided seal on the one-dollar bill. When we look at its reverse side we see a pyramid; a symbol of a pyramid itself may puzzle, even not to mention the number of thirteen steps; or the Eye of Providence and the motto above. In short, the artistic work that comes to us in symbolic language may entertain or puzzle; it may be understood right away or not at all.

* Following after the footprint of symbolism as a concept, we've finally reached the keystone by which all the parts of this sermon come together. Now we are ready to focus on teaching the truth saying by the Lord Jesus in a way of symbolism. It is *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* found in the Gospel of Luke, ch.10. Probably this well-known parable has never puzzled you whenever you heard it. Nevertheless, let's us be patient, I am sure there is still something new that the Holy Spirit may teach us.

* Now, recalling the recent talk about the self-centered purpose of our gathering at church, we cry for help in prayer, *O Lord, please, tell us that story again and let your wisdom teach us the way of life. For the sake of your most honorable name we pray, Amen.* After praying, the Spirit of the Lord opens our ears as he states, *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear* (Mar 4:23).

* Before we start, I am bound to say that *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* itself cannot be taken as the sole basis for the complete doctrine of our salvation. In theological terms, our salvation is based on two kinds of righteousness, passive and active. This parable teaches us exclusively active righteousness. Meantime its effect originates from the passive one, namely the righteousness that comes to us through our faith in Christ Jesus by virtue of his redemptive act on the cross; this treasure is a gift from the honorable, ever loving God and the Father. If we want to be faithful to the teaching of truth in full, we need to say that it is not enough to be just a "*Good Samaritan,*" but it is necessary to be a righteous man through faith in Jesus Christ, (Rom 3:21 - 24). After this comment, let's hear the well-known parable again in a shortened but thoughtful way.

* It says, a Jewish man was robbed on the road *Jerusalem – Jericho*. The bandits beat him up, took his wallet, stripped him of his clothes and left him without any hope to survive. Occasionally a priest went by that road, he saw the beaten man but didn't help; a Levite passed by as well. After awhile a Samaritan went by chance. In contrast to the other travelers, he showed compassion to the victim in all possible ways. He bound up the man's wounds pouring on them oil and wine. Then, he set him on his own donkey, and took him to an inn.

There he continued to care for the man. On the next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper saying, *'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back'*.

* To present all of the various interpretations for this parable would demand hours. In this sermon I will restrict all our discussion to only the patristic interpretation as follows. So, here it is. The wounded man stands for all fallen humanity, including me and you. While being on the road, that is our earthly life; the robbers who represent the diabolic powers of sin and wound us mortally. We are left hopeless in life. The priest and Levite represent the Mosaic Law, which by themselves cannot save us. The Good Samaritan refers to Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Under the oil and wine we understand the means of grace and the apostolic message. The inn is the Church of God, and the innkeeper represents the pastors. The morning departure of the Samaritan is the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, and the two denarius are Scripture and Holy Tradition. The promise to return is the Second Advent of Christ that will signify the settling of all debts according to one's deeds.

* That is the classical interpretation. However, if we take into account the context in which the parable was wrapped, it teaches us to act mercifully in all aspects of our relations with other people. The central idea of the parable promotes the most valuable Christian virtue named MERCY. By the acts performed by the robbers, the priest and the Levite, there was no mercy shown at all. Reflecting on this issue I'll tell you the real story. Some days ago I watched a video on the Internet snapped by a hidden camera. It showed the robbery of an elderly woman in East Harlem on 121st Street, on the 5th of June. I saw a tall man in his 30s grab woman's purse and pull it to himself while the old lady was passing by him. On that effect, she lost a balance and fell. Meanwhile the robber had already made his way out; but when he noted that the woman had fallen, he turned back, picked her up, gave her cane to her and then ran away. Thinking over this clip, I titled it as the *Merciful Robber*. In contrast to this one, the muggers from the parable beat their victim violently, robbed the man and even stripped him of his clothes. The robbers, as well as those who passed by the wounded man, didn't show any mercy.

* Now, against such a distinctive background, the image of the Good Samaritan is getting even brighter. It shines after being perfected by the compassionate mercy shown in all his acts. Friends, are you ready to name a person for whom the image of the Good Samaritan is most appropriate? I want to make your task easier. Listen, once Jesus' opponents expressed outrage at him by saying, *Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?* (Joh 8:48). Actually Jesus was not a Samaritan and has never had a demon. But the Scripture witnesses on behalf of Jesus who at all times acted with great compassion and love to the needy. He healed a leper and fed a multitude. He helped the son of a distressed father and made the blind be able to see. Often people cry after him, *O Lord, Son of David, have pity on me*, (Mat 15:22). Reflecting on Jesus and the Good Samaritan from the parable, we can imagine them as two sides of a silver coin if we speak symbolically.

* Finally, I ask you to recall the two purposes of our gathering at the church. In the light of the parable, we can be seen as the travelers wounded and robbed by sin that is in and around us. Our cry for help was heard, because our Lord is the Lord of mercy and of great compassion. Here, in the church, God in Christ Jesus removes our sins and cleans us from our infirmities. Here Jesus teaches us to be compassionate and merciful as he is; also he gives us many chances to love our spiritual neighbors, with whom we are one body in Christ Jesus. At this effect, Jesus' righteousness can shine through us in all that we think, say or do.

Beloved, God's mercy be with you always .

+ Amen +

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