

Fellows without Borders

Deuteronomy 30:10-14 Colossians 1:15-20

Luke 10:25-37

V.P. Menon was a significant political figure in India during its struggle for independence from Britain after World War II. Menon had a splendid reputation for personal charity. His daughter explained the background of this trait after he died. When Menon arrived in Delhi to seek a job in government, all his possessions, including his money and I.D., were stolen at the railroad station. He would have to return home on foot, defeated. In desperation he turned to an elderly Sikh, explained his troubles, and asked for a temporary loan of fifteen rupees to tide him over until he could get a job. The Sikh gave him the money. When Menon asked for his address so that he could repay the man, the Sikh said that **Menon owed the debt not to him but to any stranger who came to him in need, as long as he lived. The help came from a stranger and was to be repaid to a stranger.** Menon never forgot that debt. His daughter said that the day before Menon died, a beggar came to the family home in Bangalore asking for help to buy new sandals, for his feet were covered with sores. Menon asked his daughter to take fifteen rupees out of his wallet to give to the man. It was Menon's last conscious act. Menon ministered to strangers because a stranger had ministered to him.

Why have Christians been historically so charitable, so caring? It is because once we were lying beside the road broken, and bleeding, nail-scarred hands reached down to us and ministered to us in our need. While we were unworthy, Christ the Divine Good Samaritan died for us.”

The Golden Rule, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27) which we hear in today’s gospel is not just a Christian thing. Every conceivable religion and culture in the world has the Golden Rule in one form or another. Here is a sampling:

Judaism “What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the law: all the rest is commentary.”

Islam: “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.”

Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.”

Buddhism “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”

Confucianism: “Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.”

If the Golden Rule was so well-known in ancient cultures why then did Jesus spend so much time teaching it as if it was a new thing? It is because Jesus brought a completely new understanding to the commandment. The Golden Rule is understood differently in different religions and cultures. And the key to its understanding lies in the question that the lawyer asks Jesus in today’s gospel, “Who is my neighbor?” (verse 29). Who is my neighbour that I have an obligation to love?

Among the Jews of Jesus’ time there were those who understood “neighbor” in a very limited sense.

The Essenes of Qumran, for example, required new members to swear to love the children of light and hate the children of darkness. For them, your neighbor is the one who shares the same religious persuasion as yourself. Other groups, such as **the Zealots**, would understand neighbor to include only those who shared the same nationality and ethnicity with them. The average Jew would not regard the Samaritan as a neighbor. They are outsiders. The circle of neighborly love does not include them. Jesus came into a world of “we” and “them,” “we” being the circle of those recognized as neighbors, and “them” being the rest of the world regarded as hostile strangers and enemies of the people.

The new thing in Jesus’ teaching of neighborly love is his insistence that all humanity is one big neighbourhood. Thus he broke down the walls of division and the borders of prejudice and suspicion that humans erected between “us” and “them.” To bring home this point he tells the story of the Good Samaritan. This man regarded as Enemy Number One by the Jewish establishment simply because he is Samaritan, is the one who finally proves himself to be neighbour to the Jewish man in need. Thus to the question “Who is my neighbour” Jesus’ answer is: Anyone and everyone without exception.

The Mural of St. Mary’s as Fellows without border: The mural is a theological concept of love of God without border. In the picture we see God giving us the sacred heart free of cost. God used Blessed Virgin Mary as a channel to send his love. Hence Mary stands as a host to welcome all mankind to God too. The mural has many people looking at Mary and God. They represent all nations, races and cultures. In the Kingdom of God all are equal and welcomed.

The Christian understanding of “neighbor” admits of no borders. Today is the day to identify and tear down all the borders we have erected between those who belong to us (and are, therefore, deserving of our love and concern) and those who don’t (those others who can go to hell). Sometimes these walls of division are religious in nature, as in the case of religious intolerance, or in the mutual distrust and hatred between those who call themselves “conservatives” and those who call themselves “liberals.” Other times they are ethnic and racial, as in the bad blood between Blacks and Whites in places like South Africa and parts of the United State. They could also be social and economic, as in the divide between suburban neighborhoods and the inner-city. The gospel today challenges us all to dismantle these walls. This way we work with Jesus to realize his dream of the world as a neighborhood without borders.