

LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR

(The Good Samaritan: Luke 10, 25-37)

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THE unspoken comment of many of us as we read or hear a parable from the Gospels is 'This is ideal and good; but very unpractical'. It certainly does not seem to fit in with the world as we know it; our twentieth-century, fast-moving, commercial world would seem an unsympathetic place for the practice of the Christian virtues. I think the truth really is however that it is all too practical, and in our more sincere moments we know that it is only the Christian virtue which is found in the most unlikely places, which keeps the world in existence at all.

The story of the Good Samaritan is of course a story made up to point a moral: it has its deliberate artistic exaggeration. To begin with our Lord chooses a Samaritan as the hero of his story, because the Samaritans were in the eyes of the Jews highly unpopular neighbours. It would seem far less exaggerated if I were to hold up a non-Catholic as a model of some Christian virtue (as indeed I might well do), for our Lord was concerned to show the Jews that the fact of belonging to the right religion did not give them a monopoly of virtue—a point clearly we should reflect on. The priest and the Levite do not show up well in this story—for being professionally a man of religion also has its dangers! The man by the roadside lies half-dead evidently because he has been brave enough or foolish enough to defend himself against the robbers. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side of the road. They were very busy men and I am sure their heads were full of the most religious thoughts. The Samaritan presumably had no especially pious thoughts—how could he? Was he not a Samaritan? He saw human misery and succoured it. But perhaps we are wrong; perhaps he did have the same temptation as the priest and the Levite; but he allowed himself to stop and contemplate human misery (there are many who will not), and once he stopped he was overcome by pity and the rest followed. We may note the completeness of his charity; he went to a great

deal of trouble; he spent time as well as money. He even came back to enquire about the unfortunate man—who all the time I keep forgetting to mention is almost certainly a Jew. He certainly did not do things by halves.

That is the story; there follows the moral: 'Which of these three, in thy opinion, was neighbour to him that fell among the robbers? But he said: He that shewed mercy to him. And Jesus said to him: Go and do thou in like manner.' You recall that the parable was uttered in reply to the question—doubtless a captious question—'Who is my neighbour?' and he who asked being versed in Hebrew religious law would have loved a technical discussion as to the meaning of the term 'neighbour'. But our Lord would have no theoretical discussions, and one might say that he almost answers the question by asking another, namely: 'Who is not my neighbour?' For if charity is demanded from enemy to enemy, and not merely from friend to friend—then who shall set limits to it? That is precisely the lesson which our Lord intends to teach us in this parable. The whole difficulty of charity lies in its universal application.

I have already spoken of sin being a wrong, disordered love of self: but it would be false to think that we are all even naturally wholly self-loving all the time. We do naturally love others; but we love them because they are our sort, or because they are appreciative of what we do; but do we not most of us set very narrow limits to our charity in both thought, word and deed? Who has even charitable thoughts about the Communists? Yet I do not suppose the Russian Communist is more repugnant to us naturally than was the Samaritan to the Jew. Do we ever say a kind word of those who may have injured or seriously annoyed us, or of those whom we envy for one reason or another? And as for charity in action—well, you know there are some people who really practically *never* do a work of real charity. Those appalling people—unhappy people who are often imprisoned in a cage of convention or respectability—self-imprisoned in effect, they give nothing of themselves to anyone.

Love is the most practical of things; it seeks expression in deeds; it longs to be put to the test. That is, if it is true love; and there is a good deal of the bogus article about. Great love is nothing but a massive, active, creative good will, if you will, a sort of invincible good will such as we find in Christ our Lord, whose good will was

not overcome by the treachery and faithlessness of friends, who could plead for his executioners as they drove the nails into his hands: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. It consists in a giving of oneself. 'Greater love than this no man hath than that he lay down his life for his friend.' Having given us of his time, his wisdom, his holiness, Christ finally gives of himself and continues to do so each day in the Eucharist. Christian love or charity is the heart and essence of the gospel, and not everything concerning it is to be found in this one parable. But this one essential truth is emphasized. It consists in action and it applies to all men.

I ask you all to examine yourselves on two points. Is there any active practical charity in your life? Or is your life sterile, self-centred? Are you immured in the prison of self? The Mass-misser and the careless Catholic will often say in self-defence, 'I do no harm to anyone.' No; but what *good* do you do? Is the world any better, happier, because I am in it? Is my home life and marriage happy? If not, the answer will almost certainly be because someone is unwilling to give themselves. And the second point, concerning which we must ask ourselves a question, is: Whom do I exclude from the exercise of my charity? And here I mean charity in deed. We all of us, as we go through life, collect enemies of some sort; but do we just let the enmity stay there and do nothing about it, or do we seek an occasion to show perhaps by some tiny action that we forgive, no matter how unforgiving we may feel? It is a condition of receiving forgiveness of our own sins that we do not withhold it from others.

Moreover, what are these injuries that we have received compared with our own violations of God's law? We assume we have a right to be forgiven every time we go to confession, and yet we withhold forgiveness from others, and perhaps wait for years to 'get even', as we say, with our enemy. Some of you may have been the parties to some longstanding feud with a relation or an erstwhile friend. You have not spoken for years; you cut each other in the street. And, odd as it may seem, you have thought yourself justified in so acting. I do not ask you as the result of what I have said to throw yourself on his or her neck the next time you meet, but you might say 'Good morning'; you might even do him a good turn secretly. And I say positively that if you can empty your heart of the resentment you feel, the peace and

consolation you will experience will more than compensate for the effort it may cost.

But quite outside the sphere of personal relations many people assume that they are at liberty to hate whole groups of human beings with perfect impunity. As the phrase goes, they 'have no time for' or they 'cannot stand' the English, Irish, Scotch, Roman Catholics, Communists, and it would seem at times pretty well three-quarters of the human race. I know it would be foolish to take these people seriously; but it is part of charity to have tolerance towards those who think and live differently from ourselves, and to acknowledge the good which they evince in their way of life even if it is utterly different from our own.

Christ our Lord wearied not in well-doing; no man had anything but what was good and even pleasant from his hands; all were the happier and the better for their contact with him. 'Good master' says someone to our Lord, and he replies: 'Why callest thou me good? None is good but God.' In the ultimate absolute sense that is true; but Christ was God and it is because we are the sons of God and the brothers of Jesus Christ through his grace that we are called upon to see that we are creative in goodness in our small limited way as God is in his infinite way.



HE DIED IN CHAINS

T. J. McNAMARA

THE exhumation of the mortal remains of Matt Talbot took place in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, on Sunday, 29th June, 1952. His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin presided at the ceremony. The coffin of the Servant of God, when opened, revealed his mortal remains in skeleton form, and the burial shroud which appeared to be a Franciscan habit. In the coffin were also found three chains, three large medals, two crucifixes and portions of a large rosary. The medical experts, having taken the Oath, signed the medical report which will be inserted in the Acts of the Process. The ceremony is part of the Apostolic