

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
ON THE OCCASION OF THE IMPOSITION OF THE SACRED PALLIUM UPON
ARCHBISHOP WILTON D. GREGORY, SEVENTH ARCHBISHOP OF WASHINGTON
CATHEDRAL OF SAINT MATTHEW, WASHINGTON, DC
JULY 14, 2019

Your Excellency Archbishop Gregory, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Religious, My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and assure you of his spiritual closeness and prayers on this special day in the life of Archbishop Gregory and of the Church in Washington.

At the beginning of the liturgy, I imposed the sacred pallium upon Archbishop Gregory, who is called to model his life after Christ the Good Shepherd, who never ceases to lead the flock to verdant pastures and to the waters of life. The question of life and eternal life is the subject of today's Gospel on this Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. At the beginning of the Gospel, a lawyer asks Jesus, "*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*"

Of course, Jesus, the Teacher *par excellence*, knows that this lawyer knows the answer to his own question, and so he asks him to answer it. Formulating his answer perfectly, the man replies with the two great commandments: *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself*. Indeed, love is at the heart of the Gospel.

But to justify himself, the lawyer asks Jesus a second question: *Who is my neighbor?* The Lord reverses the question by telling the story of the Good Samaritan, asking: "Who was neighbor to him?" Again, the answer is perfectly formulated: "*The one who showed treated him with mercy.*" In addition to love, we find mercy and compassion at the center of the Gospel.

Jesus tells the man – and with him, all of us – "*Go, and do likewise.*" Yet, Jesus, as the Teacher *par excellence*, teaches, or rather, leads by example. He Himself is the Good Samaritan. He was the Eternal God yet made Himself lowly for us. Samaritans, after all, knew what it meant to be lowly and to be despised by others. Jesus knew what it was like to be rejected, but this did not stop Him from showing mercy and compassion toward humanity. We are that unnamed man, half dead and beaten, robbed and stripped, lying in the road. We have been robbed of our dignity and beaten by robbers – namely the devil and his minions – who have tempted us and led us into sin, blinding us to truth, leading us astray with false teachings and ideologies, leading us to become self-referential and materialistic.

Sin and poverty, whether spiritual or material, wound us profoundly. Jesus, the Good Samaritan, sees this woundedness. He sees where love, mercy, and healing are needed, and he finds us. His is *moved with compassion at the sight*. He pours the *oil and wine* of His mercy over our wounds, binds us up, places on his shoulders and takes us to the inn, which is the Church, where we can find healing and regain our strength to begin our journey again. He leaves two coins – symbolic of His divinity and humanity – for us and promises still more if necessary. He is willing to give Himself totally and completely to see that we have life. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His flock. He is the Good Samaritan who

brings healing and mercy to those wounded by sin, poverty, and other forms of alienation. He is the Teacher who leads by example, and He teaches his disciples, "Go and do likewise."

Your Excellency, as you begin your ministry here in Washington, keep the figure of Christ before your eyes. As you teach, know that you teach not only by your words but also by your example. Just as children learn all kinds of behaviors from their parents, as a spiritual father to this family of faith, you must teach the fullness of the faith – by word and deed, showing compassion and being a neighbor.

Many interpretations have been given to the story of the Good Samaritan. Some suggest that the priest and Levite did not stop to help the man, because they would become ritually impure with any contact with blood. They seemingly put ritual practices before the supreme law of love; they did not act with compassion. Others suggest that the priest and Levite were very busy and were concerned with the Temple liturgy and worship of God, which are, by the way, very important, but they did not understand the logic of charity: God is love, and worshiping him means serving others with sincerity and generosity, no matter who they are.

Still others have suggested that the priest and Levite were worried about themselves on that dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was, after all, filled with robbers and brigands. Perhaps, upon seeing the man in the road, they thought, "I should help him. I know I should, but what will happen to me if I stop to help? Perhaps, I too will be robbed and beaten. What will happen to me?" The Good Samaritan, on the other hand, asks a different question. He asks, "What will happen to him, if I do not stop to help?"

The disciples of Jesus cannot be indifferent to the demands of love. Although the Good Samaritan is not a priest or a scholar of the law, he is well-educated. His heart is educated to love and to show compassion. The organ of his body that "sees" is not his eyes but his heart. He has a heart that sees where love and mercy are needed – even among strangers – and with his courageous heart, he acts without hesitation and with great generosity.

Your Excellency, when you were first appointed as Archbishop of Washington, you told your chancery staff that you might not spend too much time in the office, because you wanted to be out among the people. Already, I have told you that you should trust this instinct. Pope Francis wants a missionary Church, a Church that goes forth – that sees where mercy is needed and acts accordingly. He wants a Church that is inclusive, so that those at the spiritual and existential peripheries may know the closeness of God. He wants those who find themselves in situations of poverty and despair may know that the disciples of Jesus care about them.

How many of us have the opportunity to be a Good Samaritan each day? It might be in comforting a sick person or visiting the elderly. On the roadside, we might see someone with a flat tire and stop to help. A young woman may be facing a difficult choice about a pregnancy and our presence, accompaniment and compassion can help her say yes to life. How many migrants and refugees are left along the roadside in poverty and misery, forced to flee their homelands, and are looking for anyone to show compassion?!!!

Here the Church, following the Divine Master, can lead by example – by being a neighbor to others, thereby fulfilling the commandment to love. Christ's love is total, human, faithful, and ultimately fruitful. He gave Himself entirely on the Cross for us and gives Himself to us once more in Holy Communion. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His flock and feeds her with His Body

and Blood. He is the Good Samaritan who brings healing and mercy to those wounded by sin and poverty. He is the Teacher who leads by example. Today, the teacher gives us each homework: *“Go and do likewise.”*