



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity - August 29, 2021

"But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'"

St. Luke 10:29 (NIV)

I once saw a teal-coloured, fully loaded Japanese sports car with a plastic license plate holder which proudly declared:

☝ *"IT'S ALL ABOUT ME".*

Another time when I was on my way home, I witnessed a young man driving a North American muscle car with a bumper sticker which arrogantly announced:

🚗 *"AS A MATTER OF FACT, I DO OWN THE ROAD".*

(Apparently, he really meant it, as he held up traffic while trying to make an illegal left turn, but he made it - laying rubber as he cut across four lanes of traffic.)

But hey:

☝ *"IT'S ALL ABOUT ME".*

Finally, one summer I happened to be driving down BC's Coquihalla Highway - about half an hour outside of Kamloops - on my way out

to the West Coast, when I was passed like I was standing still by a candy-apple-red, Italian sports car with a licence plate which pompously proclaimed:

👁️ **"AVARICE".**

But again:

👉 **"IT'S ALL ABOUT ME".**



The world never ceases to amaze me with its selfishness and callous indifference toward others – and it never disappoints my low expectations for it, either – because it has a certain “value system” and a specific set of “priorities”. Most of them start with:

- 👉 **"I"; or**
- 👉 **"ME"; or**
- 👉 **"MY"; or**
- 👉 **"MINE".**

As in:

- 👉 **"I come first."**
- 👉 **"ME – what's in it for ME? How does this affect ME?"**
- 👉 **"MY needs are more important than all others'."**
- 👉 **"MINE, it's all MINE for the taking."**

(Of course, we NEVER find this “ME FIRST” attitude in Christ’s “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church”, do we?) The sad truth is, God’s people (that is, members in good standing of the Body of Christ) often fall prey to this “ME FIRST” attitude of the world:

- ☞ **I come first."**
- ☞ **ME - what's in it for ME? How does this affect ME?"**
- ☞ **MY needs are more important than all others'."**
- ☞ **MINE, it's all MINE for the taking."**

And The Church suffers. And its true work (that of serving a desperately hurting and needful world) often goes undone. **And, what's even worse, it's frequently those who do NOT profess the Name of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour who manage to further the Lord's purposes for humanity.**



This is precisely the point that our Lord Jesus makes in today's Gospel Lesson (St. Luke 10:25-37). On one occasion, we are told (in verse 25), an expert in the Law of Moses stood up to test Jesus and asks:

"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

(The law expert was a scholar well-versed in the Scriptures who asked a rather common question, either to take issue with Jesus or, more likely, simply to see what kind of teacher Jesus was.) In any case, knowing what was in the expert's heart - his "true motives", if you will - Jesus asks him (in verse 26) to answer his own question, which the expert immediately and proudly does (in verse 27):

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

To which Jesus replies (in verse 28):

"You have answered correctly... Do this and you will live."

In truth, however, the answer to his first question was obviously one

that the expert knew; thus, he wasn't satisfied with merely **looking** intelligent. Instead, **to gain even more credibility with** (and **to appear even more imposing to**) the other people who were present, the expert, with his "follow-up" question (in verse 29), decided to put Jesus on the spot by testing our Lord and arrogantly demanding to know His own interpretation:

"But the REAL question is: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?"

In response to the expert's "real" question, Jesus, as is His tendency when having to deal with smug self-righteous people who like to make it all about themselves,

☞ (That's right, "***IT'S ALL ABOUT ME***"),

does something totally unexpected. He proceeds (in verses 30-35) to tell a parable of a man who went **DOWN** from Jerusalem to Jericho. To explain:

- ☞ **The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was about 17 miles long.**
- ☞ **And a descent from about 2,500 feet *above* sea level to about 800 feet *below* sea level (a total difference in altitude of 3,300 feet *downwards*).**
- ☞ **That is, from *high* to *low* - and from *light* to *darkness* (for the people in Jesus' time were well acquainted with the perilous and dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho, as it ran through hot barren rocky desert wilderness and was also notorious for providing ample places for robbers to waylay defenseless travellers).**

As Jesus relates in verses 31-32 of His parable, a priest (a religious leader) and a Levite (a lay associate) - in other words, two so-called "religious" people who should have known and acted better - chose to make it a higher priority to remain "ceremonially clean" (and, thus, be able to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem) rather than to risk touching what appeared to be a dead body.

☞ (Right again, "IT'S ALL ABOUT ME")



It is interesting to note that the person Jesus commends in His parable (verse 33) was a **hated foreigner** (for Jews considered Samaritans to be "dogs" and "half breeds" both physically and spiritually). In contrast, the Samaritans in Jesus' day (who occupied the territory between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north), regarded themselves as inheritors of the true religion of Moses and as descendants of the ten tribes that comprised the original Northern Kingdom of Israel.

The long-standing feud between the Samaritans and the Jews in Jerusalem went all the way back to the settlement of foreigners in the northern part of the Divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah by the Assyrians after its fall in 721 BC, as chronicled in 2 Kings 17:24. (Incidentally, the northern part of the divided kingdom was also known as "Samaria", the name of its capital city, and its inhabitants were called "Samaritans". In the same fashion, "Jerusalem", as the capital city of the southern part of the divided kingdom, was also used interchangeably with the name of Judah.) In any event, the few Israelites who remained in the vanquished "Northern Kingdom" of Israel or "Samaria" intermarried and intermingled with these foreigners - hence, the Jews' use of the derisive terms "half breeds" and "dogs" to describe Samaritans and their offspring. Moreover, there had been further trouble between the Jews and the Samaritans at the time of the Jews' return from their exile in Babylon during the 6th and 5th centuries BC (as detailed in Ezra 4 and Nehemiah 6) because the Samaritans had already built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim, near the original site of the city of Samaria; thus, the Samaritans ignored the rebuilt Temple at Jerusalem as the main (that is, sole) place of worship. As well, they only accepted as their Scriptures the "Law of Moses" (also called the "Pentateuch" or "Torah"), consisting of the first five books of the Old Testament - Genesis, Exodus,

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – meaning that Samaritans completely disregarded the later Old Testament books (including the Psalms and the Prophets) and, therefore, had (what Jews considered to be) a woefully incomplete and misguided understanding of Who God “was” and what He “was about” – hence, the Jews’ repeated use of the derisive terms “dogs” and “half breeds” to describe the Samaritans’ “watered-down” religion and religious practices.

Therefore, by using a Samaritan as the protagonist in His parable, Jesus was asserting that:

♥ **Love knows no national or religious boundaries.**



The oil and the wine that the Samaritan placed on the man’s wounds (verse 34b) were to sterilize and to promote healing. And the two silver coins that the Samaritan spent on the man at the inn (verse 35a) represented **two days’ wages**. (Now, **really**, who would spend two days’ wages on a **complete stranger?!?**) At any rate, two days’ wages in Jesus’ time was enough money to keep the man at the inn for up to **two months**. In conclusion, then, Jesus’ question back to the expert (in verse 36), in effect, becomes:

“Who proves he is the good neighbour by his actions?”

Suddenly feeling more than a little embarrassed and, most likely, chastened – no doubt because of his own prejudice toward (and hatred of) Samaritans – the law expert humbly admits (in verse 37b):

“The one who had MERCY on him.”

Jesus then commands the expert (in verse 37c) to:

“Go and do likewise.”

And Jesus requires the same of us.

In other words:

👉 ***"IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ME".***



Similarly, as St. Paul asserts in today's Epistle Lesson to the Galatians (5:16-24), it's all about "walking and living in the Spirit" and "bearing the fruit of the Spirit" (as listed in verse 22b):

"... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Bearing this in mind, I once heard the following story on a CBC Radio programme called, "Under the Influence":

"A few years ago, a man was enroute from a business trip in LA to his daughter's home in Denver to see his three-year old grandson for the last time.

"The boy, beaten into a coma by his mother's live-in boyfriend, was being taken off life-support at 9 p.m. that evening, so his organs could be used to save other lives.

"The man's wife called the airline to arrange the last-minute flight and explain the emergency of the situation, but the man got held up by relentless LA traffic and when he finally made it to the airport, he encountered long line-ups and didn't make it to the gate on time.

"When the man finally got there, 12 full minutes after the plane was scheduled to leave, he was shocked to find the plane still there. The pilot met him at the gate and said, 'They can't go anywhere without me, and I wasn't going anywhere without you.'"

Conversely, as St. Paul teaches us (in verses 19b-21a of today's Epistle Lesson) it's NOT all about fulfilling the desires of the flesh, or of the sinful nature, such as:

"...sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; drunkenness, orgies and the like; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like."

👉 (Again, "IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ME").

Instead, St. Paul reminds us that those who belong to Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. And because Jesus was crucified for us – and gave everything for us, so that we might live forever with Him in heaven – we (who are no better off than waylaid strangers on the rocky road of life: hurt, cut, and bleeding because of our sins) are to be pitied and are badly in need of forgiveness and healing, for we are so blinded and enslaved by our sinful natures.

👉 So, when we say, "I come first",

✝️ Jesus says, "Yes, ALL of my beloved come first".

👉 And when we say, "ME what's in it for ME? How does this affect ME?",

✝️ Jesus says, "ALL of my beloved can be with me in paradise".

👉 And when we say, "MY needs are more important than all others",

✝️ Jesus says, "ALL of my beloved are important enough for me to die for".

👉 And when we say, "MINE it's all MINE for the taking",

✝️ Jesus says, "ALL of my beloved – who so choose – will inherit ALL the glories of heaven".

So, when you REALLY get right down to it:

👍 ***"IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ME",***

either.

Rather,

✝ ***"IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS".***

Now, THAT'S a bumper sticker I'd really love to see.



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