NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Pope Francis provides modern-day example of the Good Samaritan

Thomas Gumbleton | Jul. 19, 2013 The Peace Pulpit

The first lesson today really gives us a very good context in which to reflect on our Gospel reading today and the letter from Paul to the Colossians. That first lesson from the Book of Deuteronomy -- the name of the book means "The Second Law" -- is really a kind of an updating; [it was] a revision of the law that had been given to Moses and the chosen people at Sinai. But now after many decades, they were in a sense overly familiar with it, took it for granted, and didn't let it really challenge them. [They] obeyed the rituals of the law, the letter of the law, but had kind of lost the spirit.

So the author of this Book of Deuteronomy speaks as though he is Moses speaking a second time now and putting new emphasis on the law. First of all, giving it a fresh application: updating the law, so to speak, because it's been so many decades and it's become just sort of a legalistic formula, not something really felt from the heart. So the author wants to update the law, make it applicable for what's happening now and also wants the people to accept the law with a new kind of interiority; let it enter into their hearts.

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Deuteronomy 30:10-14
Psalms 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37
or Psalms 19:8, 9, 10, 11
Colossians 1:15-20
Luke 10:25-37
Full text of the readings [1]

"Return to God, your God; observe God's commandments wholeheartedly." He's asking them to begin to have a new fervor about the law, but also to really see it as something that's internal to them, in their hearts. "It's something very near to you, already in your mouths and your hearts, not far off," as the author put it. You don't have to go to a far, distant land. "These commandments that I give today are neither too high nor too far for you. They are not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven to get these commandments that we may hear them, put them into practice?'

"Nor are they on the other side of the sea for you to say, 'Who will cross to the other side and bring them to us that we may hear them and put them into practice?' But on the contrary, my word," God is saying, "is very near you. It is already in your mouth and in your heart so that you can put it into practice." It's in our hearts: God is living in our hearts, trying to guide us, and so we must seek out a new kind of interiority. Go within the depths of our heart. Listen to God speaking to us now, making the law something real for this present moment.

That's what is happening in the Gospel. Jesus is trying to show this teacher of the law, who is one of those who probably has taken it too much for granted and is thinking of it only as something [like] "If I do this, God will do this for me" rather than simply trying to listen deeply to God to understand the depth of the law, the importance of the law, and how God even sums it all up, as the teacher of the law said: "First commandment: Love the lord your God with your whole mind, heart, soul, all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus wants that teacher of the law to listen deeply in his heart now. How should it be applied?

Then he tells the story, updating it at this point. It was very common in the time of Jesus for the very thing to happen which Jesus describes in the parable. He tells the story: "A man is passing on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, attacked by robbers." But then Jesus tells the story of the three people -- one a priest, another a Levite, a religious authority also. They both pass by the Samaritan. I'm sure you remember, Samaritans and Jews at this point in their history had a very hostile relationship with one another, and it would be just almost unthinkable that the Samaritan would reach out to a Jew.

Yet Jesus says, "That's the one." The Samaritan reaches out, so who's really the neighbor: the one who removes the barriers, who sees the one who is in need? Someone he must respond to, not asking questions about his worthiness, questions about his race, questions about his religion. Here's a fellow human being in need. Have compassion; reach out in love at this moment now.

The first lesson helps us to understand what Jesus is trying to do: Make the law relevant and real for this very moment. But now we must bring it down to our own times, our own day. How do we make this story of the Samaritan something real for us? I think we've heard the story so often, and we've heard the explanation of it, and we almost can hear it again without letting it penetrate into our hearts, but this morning I'm asking us: Listen to it like it's something new, something for us today.

Where would there be people like this man, who's in desperate need because he's been robbed and beat up, left half-dead? Well, this very week, this past week, Pope Francis once more shows us -- not just in words, but by his actions -- what would be the story of the Good Samaritan today. He used an example of those people fleeing from North Africa, trying to cross the Mediterranean, trying to reach asylum and refuge and become refugees where they can start life anew, have a chance.

The pope made his first official trip outside the Vatican, outside Rome, and he used the trip as a means to draw attention to a continuing humanitarian problem while chiding the world for its indifference. The number of people having to flee violence, having to flee economic desperation, having to try to find a new life: the whole world seems to be ignoring them. We have the situation in our country: the whole immigration problem, which we seem unable to really respond to in a way that, if we listen to God speaking in our hearts announcing the law of love in my own heart, we would have to respond as Pope Francis suggests.

Here are his words when he got to the place where these refugees had been trying to cross. They're stopped at a small island short of Italy and held there until some are sent back, some are finally allowed into Italy and so on, but many, many died. Thousands died because they come in boats that are not really seaworthy in any sense of the word, and so many die on the way. "These brothers and sisters of ours," Pope Francis says, "were trying to leave difficult situations to find a little security and peace. They sought a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death."

Can't we say the same thing about those people trying to enter our country, especially on our border in the south? They're leaving situations of desperation -- sometimes violence, but mostly economic desperation -- and we've responded, as Pope Francis says, with what he called "the globalization of indifference that is widespread among too many others. We have forgotten how to cry for migrants lost at sea or for migrants trying to enter our country.

"We've forgotten how to take care of each other," the pope says, "and the numbers of those who are lost are those of a war, but a side of war that no one speaks of except a few blogs that no one reads." Those are the words of the pope. Now if we really try to update the law -- love the lord your God with your whole heart, mind and soul, love your neighbor as yourself -- would it not be right here in this situation?

Instead of building a new wall -- a larger wall to keep people out at the expense of billions of dollars -- instead of allowing people to die of thirst and hunger in the desert, instead of letting people be exploited by those who charge them such high amounts to try to bring them across our border, instead of pushing them away, if we listen to the law of God in our heart, would we not give up that indifference? Sometimes it's even more than indifference -- it's antipathy. We begin to hate these people and push them back, not just ignore them.

I think Pope Francis has really highlighted what the story of the Good Samaritan should mean for you and me and the situation in which we live in our country, especially since so many of those suffering from economic

indifference or in the economic violence are suffering because of the policies we have established between our countries and these countries to the south of us that bring about economic desperation. We need to listen in the depths of our hearts, where the law of God -- that law of love -- is placed and respond to it.

The letter of St. Paul to the church of Colossae, which is our second lesson today, reminds us of who speaks this parable and who urges us to apply the law of love to the circumstances of our day, in our time, right now. It isn't any human lawmaker; the one who is speaking to us is Jesus, and listen to how Paul describes him: "Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. Jesus is for all creation -- is the firstborn and in him, all things are created in heaven on earth. All is made through him and for him. He is before all, and all things hold together in him.

"He is the head of the body that is the church, for God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him. Through Jesus, God willed to reconcile all things to himself. Through him, through his blood that was shed on the cross, God establishes peace. God establishes justice for all." So it is Jesus, the son of God, who is urging us through this marvelous parable. If we apply it to our own time and place and circumstances, he will lead us into the way of peace -- establishing peace and justice for all.

I hope we will listen deeply to this word of God today. Hear what Jesus tells us; look deeply into our heart where God is speaking to us. Follow the example of Pope Francis and give up our indifference or even our antagonism; turn to our brothers and sisters with love. Open our arms; allow them to be healed and given a chance for a full human life. That's the only way that this parable really will mean what God intends it to mean for you and me right now.

[Homily given at St. Leo Church, Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-06-29 09:39*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/peace-pulpit/pope-francis-provides-modern-day-example-good-samaritan

Links:
[1] http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071413.cfm
[2] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup