

Greetings to you! Let me take this opportunity to thank each one of you for praying for me as I attended the Committee on Bible Translation Meetings. We did have a really good week of deliberations and decisions. Our theme for this morning's meditation is 'Who is my neighbor?' When we think of the word 'neighbour' what comes to our mind is the picture of those who are immediately around us or those who are living near our homes. We have the idea that a neighbor is one of our acquaintances whom we know because of the proximity within which they live. However, Jesus has a completely different idea of who a neighbor is. In the reading from the gospel of Luke we notice that Jesus unpacks the concept of a 'neighbour' with the use of a story.

Once an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus and he asks the question, 'Teacher, What must I do to inherit eternal life?' The question is about eternal life and the things that he needs to do in order to achieve that eternal life. Since he was an expert in the law Jesus asks him what the law said about eternal life. He answered, "'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.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." The question was about eternal life and Jesus teaches from the law itself that the path to life is by loving God completely with everything one has and also by loving our neighbours with the same intensity as we love ourselves.

The teacher of the law wanted to pat himself on the back as to how good he was and how observant he was of the law. Therefore, he asks the question, 'Who is my neighbor?' Jesus then narrates a story about a man who was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho and was mugged on the way. This road was notorious for its bandits and frequent waylaying's that the people immediately could identify with. The robbers beat up the man who was travelling on that road and stripped him off his clothes and went away leaving him half dead.

As the man was lying on the road a priest happened to be passing by the same route. When he saw the injured man he moved on to the other side of the road and carried on with his journey. The priest probably said a prayer for him and moved on. He may have been worried that he would become ceremonially unclean. He could become ritually impure if he came in contact with a corpse or with a non- Jew and then he would not be able to perform his sacrifices. He therefore moves on.

The next person who comes by is a Levite. This was the tribe from which priests were chosen. He too sees the injured man and moves on to the other side. The reason he does this is two-fold. He may have seen the priest ahead of him doing nothing and therefore he may have said to himself that if the priest wasn't doing anything about the man then there was no need for him to do anything about it. The other reason maybe that he was afraid of robbers lurking nearby and therefore wanted to pass over the place as soon as possible.

The third person to come along was a Samaritan. The Samaritans were looked down by the Jews. They believed that they were an impure race because the Assyrians deported the Jews from Samaria and brought in people from other parts and resettled them there. So they were considered to be impure. However, it is this man who is moved with compassion and he gets down from his donkey and attends to the man. He bandages his wounds pouring oil and wine. The oil is to soften the wound and the wine acts as a disinfectant which he uses and then bandages the wound. He then puts him on his donkey and brought him to an inn where he took care of him. The next day he gives the inn keeper some money and asks him to take care of the man and that he would pay any extra charges if need be on his return journey.

Jesus then asks the lawyer as to which one of the three was a neighbor to the injured man. The man replies that it was the Samaritan. Jesus then asks him to go and do likewise. The point that Jesus makes is that a neighbor is anyone who is in need of help. We are called to be neighbours to those who are in need of help. May God help us that we may be willing to be neighbours to those in need.