

15th Sunday of the Year C

This Law that I enjoin on you today is not beyond your strength or beyond your reach. No, the Word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance. (Dt 30:11.14)



First Reading

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Moses said to the people: "Obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping those commandments and laws of his that are written in the Book of this Law, and you shall return to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul. For this Law that I enjoin on you today is not beyond your strength or beyond your reach. It is not in heaven, so that you need to wonder, 'Who will go up to heaven for us and bring it down to us, so that we may hear it and keep it?' Nor is it beyond the seas, so that you need to wonder, 'Who will cross the seas for us and bring it back to us, so that we may hear it and keep it?' No, the Word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance."

Second Reading

Colossians 1:15-20

Christ Jesus is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignities, Powers –. Before anything was created, he existed, and he holds all things in unity. Now the Church is his body, he is its head. As he is the Beginning, he was first to be born from the dead, so that he should be first in every way; because God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross.

There was a lawyer who, to disconcert Jesus, stood up and said to him, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? What do you read there?" He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." "You have answered right," said Jesus. "Do this and life is yours." But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of brigands; they took all he had, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan traveller who came upon him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him on to his own mount, carried him to the inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have.' Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the brigands' hands?" "The one who took pity on him," he replied. Jesus said to him, "Go, and do the same yourself."

Meditation

Jesus recounts an incident of rural violence in order to respond to the question put by a doctor of the Law: "Who is my neighbour?" This juricidist knew very well that the road to life is to be found through love of God and neighbour. But he wanted a sure and certain rule by which to identify his neighbour. Jesus' anecdote bursts open the narrowness of his concern.

An anonymous traveller savagely attacked and robbed by bandits, is left for dead in the ditch. One after the other, two clerical representatives of Judaism pass by. Neither helps the wounded man; perhaps they think him dead. Contact with a corpse would render them ritually unclean. It is a Samaritan, a man with supposedly little concern for morality or religion who stops. Encountering someone in need raises no casuistic problem for him. It rends his heart. Obeying no voice but that of compassion, he treats the victim as he would want to be treated. The doctor of the Law acknowledges that the Samaritan is the neighbour to the man who fell in with the robbers. It surprises him to find a despised Samaritan identified as the neighbour.

When Christ came to earth, he united himself with wounded humanity. Like a good Samaritan, he took pity on us. "Go and do the same", becoming neighbour to whoever needs you. Jesus forces us to define our neighbour in terms of the other's need rather than how the other would serve us.