

July 14, 2013: Go and Do Likewise!

In my two years as chaplain at St. Peter's Hospital in Albany (1995-97), I had many opportunities to speak with older Catholic doctors and nurses, whose service to the hospital covered many decades and whose wonderful example inspired many later generations of health care professionals. Over the years these dedicated men and women observed many changes at the institution: the expansion of the hospital, the advances in medical technology and the increasing role of the insurance companies in determining a patient's length of stay and the bureaucracy of daily life

But what I found particularly striking was the number of the old veterans who bemoaned the loss of the nursing sisters of Mercy, who had served in the hospital since its inception. In their distinctive white habit, the presence of the sisters on each of the wards was especially comforting and consoling to the patients, who, through their Christian witness, reminded them of Jesus' presence.

The sisters often prayed with the patients and spoke of life everlasting to those who were critically ill. My great uncle, Dr. Raymond Leddy, was chief of surgery at St. Peter's and had years of experience working alongside the sisters, who were trained nurses. He always spoke highly of the women religious as competent professionals and selfless in their commitment to implementing the Corporal works of mercy. The good sisters were caregivers in the best sense of the word because they followed the example of Christ, whose concern for the needy was unmatched.

If they were deeply committed to their work, it was surely because of their love of Christ. Theirs was a vocation and not a career choice, an opportunity to labor in Lord's vineyard and not a tedious job suggesting no earthly rewards. Let us be clear: Diplomas in nursing and medicine stand for technical skill but not necessarily for commitment, compassion and availability which often makes the difference.

The parable of Good Samaritan is one that is familiar to all of us. It is one of the best loved stories recorded in the gospels. Dr. Karl Barth, a distinguished protestant scholar of the last century, once wrote that the figure of Jesus Christ is hidden in all the parables. And where can Christ be found in today's parable? In the person of the Good Samaritan Himself!

Let me try to bring this gospel into sharper focus. The Samaritans were looked upon with disfavor by Jews, who considered them foreigners and semi-pagan. In the prophecies of Isaiah, Samaritans are twice threatened with destruction. To call a Jew a Samaritan was one of the worst insults imaginable. Yet, in our parable today the Samaritan is singled out by Jesus for praise because of his genuine concern for the welfare of another human being. He was moved with compassion at the sight of the man who fell victim to the robbers and acted in a worthy manner consistent with the

Law of Moses as interpreted by Christ. In one of his pastoral letters, the late Pope John Paul II stated: "The name "Good Samaritan" fits every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others, who "is moved" by the misfortune of others. Everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person, whatever form it may take, is a Good Samaritan".

Perhaps, the key phrase in our gospel for today is Christ's admonition "Go and do likewise." Let us ask ourselves if we can identify with the hero of the story.

In truth, the saints remain the best commentaries on this extraordinary parable. As they followed Christ's example, so must we follow their example. Perhaps some of you may remember a story about the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, now beatified by the Church. Once after observing Mother Teresa bathe a grimy, dying man just picked off the streets of the city, a journalist cried, "Mother Teresa, not for millions of dollars would I ever agree to work in the slums and carry out your ministry to the dying" "Neither would I", replied the saintly woman. Her words cast a marvelous light on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Amen.