

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
of the Diocese of St. Augustine
St. Leo University – Commencement Mass
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Acts 4:1-12, Luke 10:25-37

And who is my neighbor? (Luke 10, 29)

The lawyer who enters in dialogue with Jesus has a tendency “to talk.” “To debate,” – Jesus, the doctor of the soul answers with a story of a poor traveler who was attacked by robbers who: took his clothes – and left him naked and beat him, leaving him almost dead between Jerusalem and Jericho – lost in the wilderness

This poor traveler was a real “miserable” man – whose life became a hell in his loneliness.

One was attacked by robbers but in Boston, Massachusetts, many were violently attacked by two cruel marathon bombers leaving so, so many innocent victims with long lasting wounds and injuries from head to toe.

Today the “poor traveler” is found, among the millions who suffer the impact of broken immigration policies.

“Poor travelers” are found in the victims, especially young girls, exploited by human trafficking.

The unnamed traveler might perhaps be the lonely elder whose family cannot find the time to call, to visit, to love.

The lawyer had asked who is my neighbor? But Jesus, the teacher, does not rationalize. He changes the question into a new one, a different question: “Who is the neighbor to the poor, wretched ones?”

The neighbor was not the priest who passed on with a lot of concerns in mind; the neighbor was not the scholar who had deadlines to meet.

The neighbor was the one who loved to the extreme (John 13, 1) with such care, tenderness and sensitivity. The neighbor:

- bound up his wounds
- poured oil and wine
- brought him to an Inn
- stayed with him the whole night and prayed for all his needs for as long as he needed it.

The neighbor was Jesus, disguised as a Samaritan!

As teens love to say: “He was there for me.” He was the compassionate one, he was the neighbor who held the hand of the miser, the poor had someone, and the poor could call him “my brother” even if he did not know anything about him.

The final word of this parable is addressed to the lawyer who had asked the question, who is my neighbor? And through him, it is also a word for each one of us – Do the same, (in other words, do, act, make a difference, give!)

Recently I visited a couple in Ponte Vedra Beach; the husband was a prominent heart surgeon at the prestigious Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville. I was astounded to learn he visits death row prisoners, near Starke, Fla. These prisoners can learn at any moment that they received a death sentence. This doctor made a comment in seeing me so surprised that he was involved in this kind of apostolate. He said in reading Mt. 25, 36, “I was in prison and you came to visit me,” I became aware that I had never visited a prison.

Most of us are not at the level of this doctor’s Christian maturity. At times, it is fear that hinders us to be compassionate to others as the heavenly Father is to all.

Is there anyone who knew compassionate love better than Blessed Mother Theresa? In spite of experiencing a heavy darkness in her soul, she cared for the poorest of the poor! She did it with a feminine “genius” of great women religious throughout history. The following poem was written on the wall of her residency in Calcutta:

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you’re kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people will deceive you, be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, others may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway...

For the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

St. Leo graduates, if you embrace this wisdom of love to the extreme, in action, you will excel in living out your motto: You’ll love the person you have become at St. Leo!