

15th Sunday of the Year (C)

July 15, 2007

By Father Charles Bowes

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

Colossians 1:15-20

Luke 10:25-37

God's compassion and love can come to us even from our enemies.

As a teenager working in my father's automobile garage, I couldn't help but catch glimpses of conversations between my dad and his customers.

I recall once hearing critical remarks being made about another neighborhood businessman who also happened to be a customer of ours. "That fellow is simply a crook," one man said. "I'll never do business with him again," he said. "I know what you mean," said another. "He cheats on materials and charges too much," he said. Young as I was, I had never met a crook before, someone considered genuinely reprehensible.

So the next time the man with the bad reputation came into the station, I was a little apprehensive about serving him, thinking that maybe somehow something of what he was might rub off on me or that I might be cheated or subject to something unreasonable. Maybe, I thought, maybe he even carried a gun, as I imagined most genuine crooks surely would. So he became, in my mind, an enemy, someone to be avoided...shunned maybe.

But in business things aren't always that simple. Enemies, or supposed enemies, can be customers too. As time went on and I waited on this man with the tarnished reputation, I never did see evidence of the crookedness those other men had described. As a customer, he was great. He paid his bills. He treated me and the other employees well. His family was good too,

and he apparently loved them and took care of them. He was active in the community and did a lot of good, from what I could see. It just didn't add up, this man being a crook and all and yet doing a lot of good. He just didn't live up to his reputation of being an enemy.

And that, my friends, is precisely the point of our Gospel of the Good Samaritan, Luke chapter 10 - No Jew at the time of Jesus could imagine the compassion of God being demonstrated in the person of a Samaritan. Like with the reputation that had preceded the customer gossiped about, in my mind nothing good could come from him. Yet experience showed me otherwise. Maybe he was a crook. But when it comes to being a neighbor, we are not in charge of dictating who can or cannot minister God's compassion to the needy. We are like the injured man lying along the side of the road. God's grace and compassion can come to us in any form and by means of any person, not of our own choosing or liking. We are not the ones who determine who is and who is not our neighbor. In the Kingdom of God, boundaries defining neighbors simply do not exist.

Jesus declares that the outsider, the Samaritan, is the hero. The one we hate is the messenger of love. The Kingdom of God knows no political or religious boundaries. The relevance of this story seems even more important now than the day in which it happened. We are all interconnected with greater interaction among

peoples in every conceivable way: political, social, economic and religious. We are one human family. The immigration concerns of Americans, illegal aliens, how best humanely to deal with issues arising from that, trigger deep emotions in people. Our bishops have issued excellent guidelines to inform our policies.

Here, at Eucharist, we go through the motions of being one at the one table of the one bread and the one cup so that we, someday, one day, can be so united and accepting of everyone.

*God's compassion and love can
come to us even from our enemies.*