



## **25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St John of God Health Care - Homily**

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"Who is my neighbour?" The question which the lawyer asks Jesus in tonight's Gospel, and which Jesus answers in quite a remarkable and challenging way, is one that to my ears always has echoes of another question which was first asked in the Book of Genesis and which has been asked over and over ever since.

The Book of Genesis begins with two very beautiful Creation stories and, as they unfold, we read first of all about the wonder of God's creative work. Everything that exists came to be through God's Word - God said "let there be light, and it was made". We learn, too, that everything God made was, and is, good. Genesis tells us that "God saw all that he had made and found it very good".

Most of all, though, we learn that the high point of God's Creation was, and is, us - men and women, human beings - made in God's image and likeness: made, that is, in the image of the creating and life-giving God. And we can't do that alone! That is why God says, in Chapter 3 of Genesis: "it is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a helper to be with him". Already we learn that we are made for life and not for death, we are made for communion and not for isolation, we are made for God and not just for ourselves.

When, however, the first man and the first woman decide to push God to the sidelines and seek to make their own way independently of Him - when they reach out, in other words, to take the forbidden fruit - they unleash a power in the world which we must still grapple with today. Evil, self-centredness and what we might call "God-forgetfulness" takes over. It happens quickly, with devastating results, and proves to be, or at least seems to be, unstoppable. When Cain, out of jealousy, kills his brother, Abel, God comes looking for Abel. When God asks Cain where Abel is, Cain replies, with an arrogance which can only mean he has lost any sense of who God really is, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain's answer to his own question is, "No, of course I am not my brother's keeper. He is nothing to do with me. He must look after himself".

God's answer is very different. It is the answer God gives over and over again in the pages of the Old Testament as He calls his wandering and foolish people back to the right path. It is the answer God gives through His Word, his Son Jesus, who in the parable we have read in tonight's Mass says to us, "Yes, you are your brother's keeper - you are responsible for him - and because every single person is your neighbor, every single person is also your brother or sister".



Of course, Jesus goes even further than this: in another parable, the parable of the sheep and the goats, He tells us that not only is everyone our neighbour, everyone is our brother and sister. He dares to say to us that everyone is our Lord, everyone is our master, because every time we give a cup of water to a thirsty person, or warm clothes to a shivering person, He, Christ, our Lord and our master, is in that person. We are encountering and helping and loving Christ when we encounter and help and love another.

The opposite, of course, is also true. When we walk past the person who is suffering, as the priest and the Levite did in tonight's Gospel, or when we ignore the suffering person as people did in the parable of the sheep and the goats, it is Christ we are ignoring, Christ we are walking past in disdain, Christ we are abandoning.

Tonight, we are celebrating the remarkable fact, which is also a remarkable work of God's grace, that for the last 25 years, ever since the establishment of St John of God Health Care, so many people, in so many different ways, have refused to ignore, or abandon, or walk past Christ, suffering, ill, isolated, fearful, dying, in His brothers and sisters who are for that very reason our brothers and sisters. And, of course, in celebrating these 25 years, we are also celebrating the many, many years, and the many, many women who, as Sisters of St John of God, have served Christ in His broken brothers and sisters ever since the sisters arrived on our shores in 1895.

In tonight's Gospel, we are told that the Samaritan was moved with pity, with compassion. How different he was from the priest and the Levite! They were moved, perhaps, by self-importance, or by fear of contamination, or by arrogance, or simply by hard-heartedness. They put their rules and regulations - which told them that, as religious leaders, they were not allowed to be defiled by contact with blood - ahead of their basic humanity. They certainly did not believe that they were their brother's keeper, or that the wounded man could in any way be their responsibility.

The Samaritan could not have been more different. He had eyes to see a person in need, he had ears to hear a distressed person's call for help and, most of all, he had a heart which refused to allow him to walk past and do nothing. In the logic of the story, of course, he also had great courage. There was no way of knowing if those who had attacked the traveller might be lurking in the nearby bushes waiting to attack anyone else who was foolish enough to stop and help. The Samaritan did not pause to consider his own security: he simply reached out to someone in need.

Tonight, we celebrate, and thank God, for both compassion and courage. Without courage, without boldness, without determination, without the foresightedness of the sisters, the transition to the new structures which we acknowledge this evening could never have been achieved. And, of course, without compassion, we might have had an efficient, profitable and highly renowned health care organisation, but we might well not be here in the Cathedral, celebrating in the context of our faith, and recommitting ourselves to the challenge, the responsibility and the privilege of being a Catholic health care system determined to be, together, a living and powerful and unambiguous sign that it is Jesus who welcomes people as they walk through our doors; it is Jesus who treats each and every person with extraordinary sensitivity and dignity, it



is Jesus who brings healing, renewal, hope and acceptance to those who entrust themselves to us.

Am I my brother or sister's keeper? Of course I am. Who is my neighbour? Everyone is. May the awareness of this truth, and the recognition that it is Christ's face we are called to reveal to others, mark the next 25 years as surely as it has marked the last.