



## **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 14 July, 2019  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In today's Gospel, we hear once again the very familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. Just as some people have suggested that the parable of the Prodigal Son should be re-named as the Parable of the Loving Father and His Two Sons, because this better describes what the parable is really all about, so I wonder whether or not the parable of the Good Samaritan might better be called the Parable of the Compassionate and Merciful Stranger. I say this, because it seems to me that the key words in this morning's parable are the words which tell us that the Samaritan traveler was *moved with compassion* when he saw the plight of the stranger.

In some ways, these words take us to the heart of the Gospel message. Being a faithful disciple of Jesus concerns both what we do and why we do what we do. While the priest and the Levite walk by on the other side ignoring the plight of the wounded and helpless man, possibly because they were afraid that in coming to the aid of this man they might render themselves ritually impure and unable to conduct the services of their religion, the travelling Samaritan has no such concerns. He allows his heart to be moved with compassion, a compassion which leads him to act with mercy and generosity.

In doing so, the Samaritan was more faithful to the Jewish law than the religious leaders of the day. They had perhaps forgotten the words of the psalm which reminds them, and us, that what God wants is mercy, not sacrifice, knowledge of God rather than mere ritual purity. It is not of course that practicing your religion does not matter. It does matter for our faith and our religion are God's gift to us to enable us to live truly faithful and holy lives. But a sincere practice of our faith, rather than mere external observance, will inevitably begin to change us, to shape our hearts, and to create great love and compassion within us. If living our faith does not do this for us, then something is drastically wrong.

Many of you will remember that in 2016, we lived the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. As time goes by, it is becoming ever clearer that at the heart of Pope Francis's understanding of the gospel is his belief in the merciful love of God. It is why the parables of Jesus including this morning's gospel are so important to the Pope. This was brought home to me once again just three weeks ago when the Australian bishops had the opportunity to spend over two hours with Pope Francis listening to him and sharing with him our concerns for the Church here in Australia.

At the heart of his message to us was the call for gentleness, for compassion, for mercy and for understanding. In this, of course, Pope Francis was simply reminding us that as disciples of Jesus we can do no other than seek to be merciful as Jesus was merciful, to be forgiving as he was



forgiving, to be compassionate as he was compassionate, to be encouraging as he was encouraging.

In 2016, as I moved around the diocese and especially when I visited any of our schools or was with young people, I found myself using the phrase “large-hearted” to explain the deepest sense of the Year of Mercy. As the Gospels constantly remind us the mercy and compassion of Jesus were not restricted to those who were perfect. In fact, of course, the opposite is true. The more desperate, the more lonely, the more lost and the more despised people were the more eager Jesus was to reach out to them. Think, for example, of the story of the Prodigal Son or of the encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. Think of the story of Jesus meeting Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, who had climbed a tree to see him. Think of the lepers, or the man born blind, or the widow who had lost her only son. And perhaps especially today think of the Good Samaritan in this morning’s Gospel story. In speaking of this man as being moved with compassion, Jesus is inviting us to see in the Good Samaritan an image of himself, the one who reveals the merciful face of God to us, and at the same time an image of what we are called to do and to be and what we can do and be if we allow the Lord to live within us.

And so this morning’s Gospel invites us to reflect on who the wounded and broken stranger might be in our own lives. Whose paths do we cross perhaps only occasionally or perhaps every day who are in desperate need of our help our compassion and our mercy? They may indeed be strangers but they might also be closer to us than we realise. The priest and the Levite were too focused on themselves to allow their hearts to really notice, really see, the person in front of them who needed them. Might that not be the same for us? Perhaps the wounded stranger is even in our own home, in our own family. It might be your husband or wife, your children or your parents, your brothers or sisters, who are in some real sense strangers to us because, wrapped up as we are in our own concerns, we do not see the despair, the loneliness, or the fear which has them trapped.

If this is true, and I suspect that it is true at least to some extent for every single one of us, then today the Lord is inviting us to ask him to give us hearts that can be moved with compassion, to help us to be the large-hearted, warm-hearted people that he created us to be. It is surely a prayer which, if prayed sincerely, God will hear and answer. In this way, as members of the family of God, we can contribute to the task of the Church, which, as Pope Francis once famously explained to us, is to be healers of people’s wounds and warmers of people’s hearts. And so we pray today in the words of Scripture: *create a clean heart in me, O God, and put a steadfast spirit within me. Remove from me my heart of stone and give me instead a heart of flesh.*