

Solemn inauguration of the academic year 2016-2017
466th year since the foundation of the *Collegio Romano*
(now the Pontifical Gregorian University)

"When he saw him, he had compassion"

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37 (The Good Samaritan)

Homily of the Rector Fr. Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, SJ

The Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola at Campus Martius, Rome, 3rd Oct 2016

We have just heard a passage of Scripture which is at the very centre of the Gospel message. The identity of the Christian is present in a unique way in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a parable which has inspired saints and artists, and which lives in the memory, imagination and heart of every Christian. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the parable of the Good makes us uncomfortable and it asks us crucial questions: On which side of the road would I have been on that day on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho? And today, which side am I on, as I walk the streets of a world where the danger is no less present, and where I can find those who are in need of help on every corner?

The dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer is one of a gradual deepening. The lawyer asks "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds to this question with another question: "What is written in the law?" The lawyer then recalls the centrality of love of God and love of neighbour, and Jesus praises his answer: "Do this and you will live."

But this is not enough. The lawyer wants to really put Jesus to the test and asks him: "And who is my neighbour?" In telling the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus turns the question around and offers an unexpected response. Do not ask who your neighbour is, do not try to define the limit how far you have to go in your generosity. Rather, become neighbour to the one who needs you, stand in front of the one who is between life and death. Have compassion on them, come close to them, bind up their wounds, take care of them. Compassion has no limits; our attentiveness to the other is for all occasions, and our love of neighbour is not regulated by our "window of availability".

Seeing is not enough! The Gospel is very clear: the Priest and the Levite, they both saw. However, they passed on by without doing anything. The difference lies in seeing and, followed by showing compassion. The difference is when the reality before my eyes changes my heart and makes me neighbour to those who need me. This is the greatness of the good Samaritan: "He saw him and had compassion"; and this compassion became action which used the means necessary to help the man who has been mistreated and abandoned.

Having heard the parable, the lawyer continues to respond well to Jesus. He understood the message: The neighbour is one who has seen, one who stopped, and who showed compassion. And Jesus then sends him away, simply saying: "Go and do likewise."

That the Christian life is both a task to be done, and a conscious action to be lived is clear in this dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer. Christian love is active and hard-working, it never passes by on the other side. Therefore, as Pope Francis says, the Church is a "field hospital", "a Church which goes forth", to walk the streets of this world, even the most dangerous and infamous of them, streets just like the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

At the beginning of this academic year, has the message of the Gospel today anything to do with our lives at the Gregorian? I am very much convinced that the answer is yes. Even at the Gregorian, there are many occasions to take care of one another. Many occasions to see, and to stop without passing by. Many occasions to say a word of help and encouragement when someone next to us goes through a moment of discouragement or loneliness. I assure you that there are very many joys at the Gregorian, however, every so often, life in a new environment, far away from ones own country, far away from family or from friends is not easy. In these moments, the help of those around us is essential.

Finally, do not forget that the Good Samaritan is Christ Himself. Christ who saves. Christ who sees those who have fallen, and who never passes by on the other side. Christ who lifts one up with compassion and mercy. Christ who keeps telling us: "Go and do likewise."