

Homily for the Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 14, 2019
By Bill Pitocco

A worthy life is a simple life. This is exactly what Moses was speaking about in the First Reading. The secret to happiness and fulfillment in life is not far away up in the sky or way across the sea. Hollywood builds on the theme that you can find true happiness "somewhere, over the rainbow..." Those are touching ideas but Moses said the secret is inside of you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry them out." We don't have to search out elusive gurus on Tibetan mountaintops, as Bruce Wayne tried to do. We don't have to hunt for secret documents stashed away by the Freemasons in a secret chamber 500 years ago, as The DaVinci Code would have us believe. We have received the gift of knowing the meaning of life. Jesus gave it to us with the simple command: "love your God with all your mind and all your soul and love your neighbor, and you will live."

And the really exciting part of life, the lasting satisfaction of life, doesn't come from an endless search. Just as the really satisfying part of Thanksgiving dinner isn't buying the groceries but sharing the meal. The real drama of life starts after the truth has been found. It comes when we courageously try to live it out. That can seem intimidating, because with great power comes great responsibility. Hollywood stole that from our faith!! ...

The truth is the greatest power there is. Christ offers it to us, in perfect, clear, simplicity. But accepting the offer means accepting the responsibility. We enjoy the parable, but the "go and do likewise" part at the end makes us uncomfortable. But we need to trust in Jesus. We need to step out of the movie theatre and start living this simple, powerful truth. As St Vincent Pallotti, the great Italian nobleman who became a priest and tirelessly served the poor, said it like this: "Remember that the Christian life is one of action, not of speech and daydreams. Let there be few words and many deeds and let them be done well."

Christ's lesson is so simple! "Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself, and you will live." It is within all of our reach to live out this simple lesson. It was even within the reach of a Samaritan, and Samaritans were considered very low class by Jews at the time of Jesus. It summarizes the entire gospel, the entire meaning of life, with such eloquent simplicity! But we are not satisfied with simplicity. We, like the scholar in the Gospel passage, pester Jesus for clarifications, "Yes, but who actually is my neighbor? ..." He didn't lose patience with the questioning scholar, and he doesn't lose patience with us. He gives us the parable to explain what he means. And through the centuries, he has generously given further explanations: the words and examples of thousands of saints, the teaching of the Church in every age, the nudges of our conscience...

But we still complicate our lives; we still find it hard to learn the lesson. It's almost as if part of us doesn't really want to learn it. Why? What holds us back from deciding once and for all to make Christ's standard our own? Each of us has our own brand of selfishness, and selfishness creates comfortable shadows in our lives. When we get too used to them, the simple, bright light of Christ's truth hurts our eyes. But in our hearts, that simplicity rings true. We see the brilliant, clear portrait of the Good Samaritan, and we understand it perfectly. Then we hear Jesus summarize the whole meaning of life by saying: "Go and do likewise." "Go and do likewise," he tells the questioner in today's Gospel that if he will, he will be like the Good Samaritan, and he "will live."

This week, let's experiment with our faith.... Let's erase all the complicated self-help theories and all the marketing campaigns from our hearts and minds and actually try to follow this simple formula for living a life that is truly alive. There are two ways we can do that. First, we can carry out our normal, everyday responsibilities with the right intention. Often we forget that most of our daily duties are actually Good-Samaritan-like deeds. The mother or father running a household is being a Good Samaritan for everyone under their care. Every laborer or professional dedicates 8 or 10 hours every day to providing some kind of service for other people who need it. The kid who is faithful to his chores and his other activities is forming his character and getting ready to go out into the world to serve his neighbors. When we see our normal

responsibilities from Christ's perspective, they take on their true, Good-Samaritan-like meaning. When we live them like that, we experience a deep sense of joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment; our lives suddenly shift into gear, and we feel like we're really going somewhere.

The second way to implement Christ's simple formula is to decide right now, enlightened by the example of this parable and strengthened by the Holy Communion we are about to receive, that when we run across someone in need this week, we will lend them a hand. We all learned along time ago, whatever you have done to the least of my children, we have done to him. Whether friend or stranger, whether the need is material or spiritual, let's promise Jesus today that at least this week we will not just walk by on the other side of the street, but instead we will "Go and do likewise." Because a worthy life is a simple life and if we do, Jesus promises us, we will live.