

Dear Friends:

The parable in the Gospel today is very familiar to us. When we hear the words, “the parable of the Good Samaritan,” most of us could provide highlights of the story. Today I’d suggest that we focus on the three major characters in the story: the Levite, the Priest, and the Samaritan. Remember that this story was told by Jesus to the Jewish people. When there was a need for someone to reach out to the injured man, the listener would expect the Levite or the Priest to have done so. But they didn’t. Instead, they avoided him. But the one who would be least likely to help, the Samaritan, was the one who was moved with compassion, approached the injured man, and showed him mercy. We are reminded that we, too, must “do likewise” as Jesus says. We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The question, then, is whether we do this when the opportunity arises, or do we reject other people in whatever way?

With that in mind, I want to offer some comments regarding the highly discussed and fairly controversial decision by some leadership authorities in the City of Battle Creek to allow the crosswalks adjoining our church to be painted multicolor in recognition of “Pride Month.” While these crosswalks are intended to be painted as such for only a short period of time, it gives us a chance as Catholic Christians to be reminded of what our faith teaches us. Regardless of our personal opinions, we must reach out as the Good Samaritan did, and not reject others who may be in need.

I want to share with you that upon learning of this decision only a few days before it was carried out, I made inquiries about why this was being done, and why this location. I was told that there were a few locations that the “BC Pride” group was given from which to choose, and the intersection of Capital Avenue and Van Buren Street was chosen—although I was not told why. I was also told that some of the leadership of the City was not aware that this decision had been made. The stated reason for the painting of the crosswalks was to “serve as visual symbols of both the LGBTQ community and (their) impact on the city community at large.” It was also stated that the crosswalks would “act as a symbol of welcome and acknowledgement to the LGBTQ community as well as visitors,” and to “recognize the contributions that BC Pride has made in the past ten years to the community.”

To determine whether the motives behind this action are in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church, we must consider the following points. If the stated goals are true, then the motivation is to allow this group to publicize their identity. If the stated intentions are true, then the display of this group’s identity is not contrary to Church teaching. Let’s be clear, the Catholic Church unequivocally teaches that “being homosexual” is not a sin, but homosexual “actions” are sinful... just like any sexual relationship outside of a true marriage.

All this being said, I understand the disappointment of many that this location was chosen and that the community at large was not given an opportunity to be informed in a timely and open way so that they could provide important input. It is my sincere wish—and request—that other groups be equally identified for their contributions to our community. For example, crosswalks should be painted with a “thin blue line” for Police Appreciation Week. Or they could be painted “red, white and blue” for Veteran’s Day or Memorial Day. If these things don’t happen, then some are choosing to walk away from other people who in highly deserved ways should receive acknowledgement and respect. If this doesn’t happen, then I personally and pastorally say that painting these crosswalks in any colors should never be allowed again.

Finally, as a parish, we continue to invite all people, no matter who they are, to “come and see,” and to know that they are welcome at St. Philip’s where they can find the forgiving and merciful love of Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the very presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and the love of our parish community.

It is my sincere hope that this reflection will assist us in being reminded of the teachings of the Catholic Church and, like the Good Samaritan, to remember the respect and love we owe to all of our neighbors.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Fr. John