

## **„Let’s do likewise” Luke 10:25-37**

**25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**

**30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'**

**36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)**

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

In today’s Gospel text we have this perennial question asked – what should I DO to inherit eternal life? Jesus answers with one of the most beautiful parables. However Jesus not just answers lawyers question, but also challenges the lawyer to change His whole understanding about God and our responsibilities.

To structure our thoughts discussing this Gospel text I’d propose that we try to look at three questions. [1] What do we think God wants from us? [2] What does God really wants from us? [3] How can we give Him what He wants?

**First**, what do we think God wants from us? The lawyers questions reveals the most widespread misunderstanding about God. Unfortunately it is widespread even in the Church. What is this misunderstanding? What should *I do*?

We tend to think that God is waiting for our good and noble works, for our proper actions. That there is some kind of a deal between us and God. That we are as two equal

parties, I do this and you do that. If we can deliver, He will be happy and give us what we want. Then we will inherit eternal life, or other things which we'd like to have.

Besides, most people just assume that they know what God expects from them, even without looking what exactly He Himself says. Some time ago it was summarized as not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to commit adultery... at least, not too often.

Today this self-made common knowledge about what God wants from us can be described as - to be a nice person and to accept everyone. If only we meet this standard, according our own measurements, of course, then God has to be pleased with us.

Why do we have this misunderstanding? It gives us impression that we are in control. That we can control or determine God's attitude and judgment on us. By what we do, or by what we avoid to do. This is a part and parcel of our desire to be like gods ourselves. We want to be in control. Even in relations with God.

This is what people usually think of God. That He is a legalist. And it is so wrong. So wrong. If this is what we think of God, that's no wonder we are not interested to be with Him. Now we come to **our second question** – what does God really wants from us?

Jesus asked: "What is written in the Bible?" The lawyer replied. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

These words sounded weird when Moses said them speaking on behalf of Yahweh. All the nations knew that there was God, and they all had the same misunderstanding about God, which we just discussed. That was fine for them to fear God, to obey God, to bring their sacrifices to God, and so on. But to love God, what is that about?

Of course, if you think that God only cares about our works, that He is only a kind of supreme Judge, which He also is, among other things, then you worry only about how to do the right thing to make your 'god' happy.

However, we see from these words that our God is totally different. What is He asking for? Did you kill, did you steal, were you a nice and accepting person? Have you delivered your part of our deal?

No, He is asking for love. Have you loved me with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind?

Our relations with God in the Bible is often portrayed with help of a marriage analogy. God as a faithful bridegroom and the Church as a bride.

Now, let's take a moment to consider what are loving relations between spouses? Do we think this way – what should I do to get my part of a deal done so that I don't need to worry about it anymore? Is this a question loving spouses ask one another?

Let's translate it into our relations with God. Our God is looking not for our works, but for us. Yes, for us! When we love someone, we want to be with them, we want to be together, to enjoy the presence of a loved one, to learn more about them, to find out how can we make them happy. Besides, when we do it, we do it not as a compulsory task, but from our heart, for this is what we want to do.

We never ask, what should I do, so that it is done? Love is not about getting out of relations, but about getting in as deep as possible. This is what our God is longing for. This is what He created us for. This is what He expects and demands from us. This is the only thing that can give complete fulfillment for our lives.

How miserable against this background sound our self-justification before self-made image of god, that I haven't done anything wrong, or that I have been quite a good person.

If you love God, then why do you ignore His invitations? He comes to us every divine service, waits for us, speaks to us, brings and gives us everything we may need, - life, meaning, wisdom, restoration of our broken lives, shalom.

He, God Creator and Redeemer comes to us ... and we can answer: "I haven't done anything wrong." What a foolish answer! Is this a way we express our love?

When Jesus said that lawyers answer is correct this guy begun to look for escape to justify himself. The first commandment regarding the relations with God he thought He had kept, but he felt trapped with the second commandment to love one's neighbor as ourselves.

"Who is my neighbor?" Probably he was looking for a list of persons, which would make his task manageable and he could praise himself for delivering it. Jesus replies with the parable of Good Samaritan and turns things upside down.

Let's take a look at the parable. The 17 miles long road from Jerusalem to Jericho historically has always been dangerous even up to 19<sup>th</sup> century when Western travelers still reported attacks of robbers on this road. How much more in time of Jesus.

This man was robbed, stripped, beaten and left half dead on the road. Now by chance the priest was going on this road, what a good coincidence!... but when he saw him he passed by on the other side.

Don't rush to judge the priest. It's not that simple. Do you know how people were identified in Jesus times? By their language or dialect, or by clothes. Quick look at ones clothes would reveal who was this person.

In this case the man was left half dead, obviously he couldn't speak to identify himself and he was also naked. The priest couldn't know whether he was Israelite or gentile unbeliever.

He could assume that the man was brother Israelite as it happen on their land, but he couldn't be sure. He would need to help him if the man was Israelite, but how would he know for sure? What he saw before him was naked, beaten, half dead or seemingly even dead stranger.

Anyway, why wouldn't priest hurry to help him, or at least to check if there is anything he could do. As Jesus puts it, priest was heading to Jerusalem. The most probable reason was that he was going to perform his duties in the temple. To be able to do this he had to follow all the rules of ritual purity.

If he decided to help and this man was already dead, then the priest had defiled his purity. To touch a corpse was on the top of the list about possible reasons for defilements.

If he was defiled, he wouldn't be able to serve in the temple. If he couldn't serve in the temple, he couldn't take care of his family and they would be left without provision. Easy choice? Not at all.

Besides, it was impossible to know where are these robbers, may be they were still around. That would be a risky business to stay longer in this place. You see, this is not the case that the priest was a cold-hearted moralist. Not at all. A lot was at stake for him.

Next came a Levite. He also passed by. Why? When you traveled on roads like this it was important to know who else is on a road. You would try to get some information from those whom you meet, you would try to read footprint on the road, and so on.

Jesus parable implies that the Levite knew about the priest. Now the Levite faces the challenge with the man on the road. He obviously knew from the footprints that the priest had passed by.

There were many good reasons for the Levite not to touch the man on the road. The priest, as belonging to higher level of society, probably was riding. The Levite probably was traveling by foot. He wouldn't be able to bring this man too far anyway.

Besides, he saw that the priest had passed by. How would it look if he had helped this man, whom the priest left on the road. This would be similar to you seeing that your pastor didn't care to help someone, but you would help thus risking to show the pastor in a bad light.

And don't forget that the Levite also had to be careful in case if robbers were still near. There is no good reason to judge him either.

Then, and this was a big surprise for Jesus listeners, he mentioned Samaritan as the third person traveling on the road. His Jewish listeners would expect that the third could be simple an Israelite, but not a Samaritan.

There was a deeply rooted hatred between Jews and Samaritans. Some of Jewish daily prayers even contained petitions against Samaritans. Now Jesus introduces in this parable a Samaritan.

And this Samaritan had compassion! Of course, he didn't have to worry about the purity rules, that's right. But there were many other things to worry about. Nevertheless, he stopped. He bound wounds pouring on them oil and wine. Then he set the man on his own animal and brought him to an inn.

As we picture this situation, this should took a while for the Samaritan to do all of this. To give this man a first medical aid. Perhaps he had to share some of his clothes to cover man's nakedness. To prepare him for a ride. All this time he put himself under the risk of attack so that only he can save this man, this stranger.

Then the Samaritan put the man on his own animal. It means that now he had to walk, to be able to deliver this man to an inn. He had made himself very vulnerable if someone wanted to attack him.

But here comes even more. At that time principles of blood vengeance where strongly present in Palestine. If someone had done something wrong to your people, you would seek a vengeance from those who done it, or from their relatives, or even from those who were distantly related to offenders.

Blind hatred that accompanied these acts of vengeance was anything but reasonable. What did it mean for the Samaritan? Only one thing; it could happen that as he, hated Samaritan, would bring to the inn beaten to death Israelite, he risked to be killed by other fellow Israelites because he was found near the beaten and robbed man.

That would be wise and understandable if he'd just left the man outside of the inn and moved away. Instead, he brought him into an inn and took care of him. Regardless of the risk. Even more, the next day he gave two denarii to the innkeeper and ask to take care of the man, promising that if there will be additional costs, he himself will cover them.

Now, and listen carefully what Jesus was asking: "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

Jesus turns the lawyers question around. Not who is my neighbor, but who of these three proved to be a neighbor to this man? What Jesus is saying – there is no fixed list of your neighbors!

You have to became a neighbor to anyone who is in a need. There are no limits. It is not about completing the task and relaxing. It is about continuous following to our Teacher who doesn't cease to care about us.

What a wonderful story. So nice, so edifying. Yes, if we look to it as a story. But it isn't. "You, go and do likewise." This is what Jesus said. Suddenly this nice story becomes to us a command of God. It becomes an explanation what does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself.

This is not optional, not to us, if we consider ourselves Christians. First, love you God with all your heart, and second, love your neighbor as yourself. This is what God really wants, demands, and expects from us.

When we will come before His throne, these will be the things He will require – have you done them? Have you been like this Samaritan to those who needed your help, and to whom I sent you?

'That's why I created you, that's why I gave you life and all your abilities. Not to waste them trying to love and please yourself more than anything, but to love me, your God, and your neighbor.'

Right there this nice story ends, and we lay beaten and naked before our God. We can't speak for there is no way to justify ourselves. We are naked for He sees our thoughts and our hearts, and we know that all His accusations are well deserved. He knows that we haven't done much. What we really want is to love ourselves more than anything.

**Our third question** becomes the most important. How could we give our God what He expects from us? As soon as we look at God's demands, we know the answer. It is not a good answer - there is no way we can give our God what He rightly expects from us. No way.

Not on our own. Not without help from outside. Before the demands of God Creator we are robbed and beaten by our sin and devil, and we can't help ourselves to get where we are supposed to get. Laying on the road of our lives, unconscious and helpless like this man, not realizing what is our situation, we can only dream that we are doing great things in our life.

This is where our Good Samaritan comes. Jesus Christ. He is usually hated as the outsider, as one who doesn't belong to our tribe. He is ridiculed by those who don't know Him. He is often denied even by those who know Him. Nevertheless He comes ready to risk with everything He has, just to heal and to rescue us.

He knows that it will cost Him a lot. The Samaritan got away alive. Jesus didn't. His desire to help us cost Him His life, in the most painful way, on the cross. Abandoned by everyone. Nevertheless He comes to each of us. Why, we may wonder.

Because He knows that right now - we are His neighbors! Because we are helpless and need His help. No one else can help. Not your pastors, not your relatives or friends. He is the one, who truly loves you as Himself and gives whatever it takes to save you.

We are not alone. Our God doesn't leave us beaten and robbed by sin and devil. He binds our wound and heals them. He gives us whatever we need and He promises that if we'll need more, He will take care of it.

What can we say? What can we do? Of course, our God has created us to love Him and to love our neighbor. But our performance is not a prerequisite for His love to us. This we know for sure.

He loves us first in the most amazing ways. All self-made gods just require and require from us, but they can't help us. We are left on our own. True God as He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ is totally different.

Of course, He is our Creator and He has created us with a certain purpose, and He expects, He demands us to fulfill this purpose, for our own benefit and joy. But He is the only God who as a loving Father comes to us and actually helps us with our responsibilities.

He sends His Holy Spirit, helper, counselor and comforter to be with you all the time. When you learn about His love, it changes everything. When you realize that you are His neighbor in need and He genuinely loves you as Himself, when you are so much loved by someone, it makes you beautiful and unique.

It gives us wings and it inspires and empowers us to be neighbors to those who are in need. When He, Jesus Christ, our God and Samaritan is with us, we can also say, let's go and do likewise." Not on our own, but with God's help.

Amen.