

Homily for July 11, 2010

Were I a screenwriter, I'd love to write a screenplay for the story of the good Samaritan. I think it would make a very good short film.

I'd keep the story in its own first century Mediterranean setting and I'd open with an aerial shot, zooming in on a band of highway muggers walking away from a limp, half-naked, wounded body on the road that goes from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Cut then to a scene in a simple inn where an innkeeper is waiting on two customers, seated at different tables, each having dinner. From the innkeeper's conversation with them we learn that one is a priest and the other a Levite.

Like most priests, this one is complaining... complaining about how much work he has to do with no one to help.

The Levite's chatter with the server helps us understand that Levites also worked in the temple, as assistants to priests. Their contemporary Catholic counterparts would be deacons, lectors, ministers of the Eucharist, ushers, cantors and altar servers.

The priest and Levite each listen in on the other's conversation with the innkeeper, but, class dividing them, they don't speak to each other... UNTIL the innkeeper mentions -- *the Samaritans*: those lousy, lazy, good-for-nothing foreigners who are nothing but terror and trouble for law-abiding folk like the priest, the Levite and the innkeeper.

NOW these two temple-types have something to talk about, they have something in common: their animosity towards the despised Samaritans.

After a while, the priest looks out the window and noting where the sun is in the sky, he decides it's time to leave. As the camera follows him down the road until he comes across the man from the first scene: he's still bleeding and in worse shape now than before. He wants to help but touching the man might render the priest ritually impure, -- and he does need to get back on time to the temple for services -- so he crosses to the other side of the road and moves on.

Cut back to the inn where Levite, who had ordered dessert,
is just leaving the table.
The camera follows him down the road to the same, sad sight.
He stops, he looks... he thinks,
“The priest must have seen this man and done nothing.
Maybe he knows something I don’t know.
And I don’t want to seem to be upstaging my boss...”
So he crosses to the other side of the road and moves on.

As the camera closes in on the dying man’s face,
two sandaled feet enter the frame.
The camera pulls back and there stands a man, troubled and in tears,
remembering the times when he’s been beat up and left on the road,
just for being -- a Samaritan.

He pulls some oil and wine from his sack,
cleans and bandages the man’s wounds and hoists him on his donkey
to take him to an inn he remembers is just down the road.

Cut back to the inn where innkeeper isn’t at all keen
on taking in a Samaritan but the man who brought him has money
with a promise of more money to come in a few days.

The final scene is a small crowd gathered outside the temple.
The camera approaches from the vantage point of the Levite
who notices the priest he met back at the inn:
he walks over and stands near him.

As the crowd is listening to a young rabbi speak
a legal scholar in the audience begins to question him.
The camera takes a two shot, just the rabbi and the lawyer who asks,
“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
The rabbi answers with a question, “What does the law tell you?”
And the lawyer recites the well-known answer,
“Love the Lord with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself.”
Close up on the lawyer asking, “But who is my neighbor?”
With the camera still on the lawyer, the rabbi begins to speak,
“Let me tell you a story about a man who fell victim to robbers
who left him half-dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho...”

The camera pulls back and pans the listening crowd
where the priest and the rabbi hesitantly steal a glance at each other
and slowly make their way to the temple doors
lest they be late for the service...

The camera finds the rabbi who finishes his story with another question:
“Which of these was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?”

