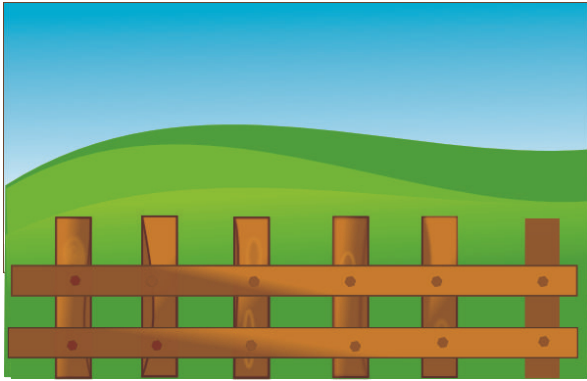


FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



Bad fences make good neighbors. That's what Fr. Bob, may he rest in peace, said to our neighbor when, in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene, he knocked on our door to tell us that one of our trees had fallen onto his fence. I'm not sure if he had the same sense of humor as Fr. Bob, because we ended up paying to fix it!

In today's Gospel, Luke 10:25-37, Jesus is asked "Who is my neighbor?" His answer is reflected in what Fr. Bob said to the guy next door to us.

Jesus uses the example of the man who fell victim to robbers, and the subsequent response of three people to his situation. Some found excuses not to help -they had good fences- but one treated him with mercy-there was no

impediment, no barrier between himself and the one in need- he showed compassion.

Fences, walls, paths, sidewalks, boundaries, doors and gates exist to delineate 'my side' and 'your side', what is 'ours' and what is 'theirs'. Fences deter trespassing.

I once saw a sign on a front lawn which said 'Please do not walk on the grass, people live here.' That said it all. No matter who you are, you are not welcome, stay away. And yet it's not really surprising. When did you ever see a sign that read "Trespassers welcome" or "Solicitors welcome" or "Do not beware, no dog lives here"?

There are, of course, many kinds of fences, many obstacles and barriers which can prevent people from being neighbors. They do not merely delineate the limits of physical property, but mark out and regulate the extent to which social interaction takes place. Language, race, ethnicity, religion, accent, skin color, age, financial status, education, physical appearance, disinterest, health or sickness, other's behavior, or the behavior of their children, to name a few.

Jesus says that a neighbor is one who shows compassion. Compassion means 'to suffer with.' It is not to be confused with pity, which is devoid of hope.

The opposite of compassion is not, as we may think, lack of compassion, but rather false compassion. False compassion is perhaps the most terrible fence that exists, and until it is broken, we will never truly be neighbors to others, and they can never be neighbors to us.

Donald DeMarco, in an article titled "The Virtue of Compassion" *Lay Witness*, (January- February 1999) comments that 'every virtue has its bogus pretenders. Foolhardiness passes for courage, timidity for prudence, apathy for patience, obsequiousness for courtesy, and credulity for faith. But there is no counterfeit that is more successful in obscuring the genuine article, especially in the present era, than false compassion.

Whereas chastity is the contemporary world's most unpopular virtue, compassion is clearly its favorite. It has become a cultural imperative that we have compassion for others. Compassion's popularity, unfortunately, is so great that it tends to isolate this virtue from all those other factors it needs in order to remain truly a virtue.

Consequently, compassion becomes an argument unto itself, so to speak, to justify euthanasia, abortion, sterilization, and sundry other actions and rights that are aimed at reducing the amount of misery that currently afflicts humanity.

But separated from love, light, generosity, hope, patience, courage, and determination, and the Cross, "compassion" becomes nothing more than a code word whose real name is expediency.

The Christian brings to his suffering neighbor love, hope, and the light of the Cross.

May each of us treat others with compassion today.

Fr. Sean