

All of us use the expression: "on a second thought." We often tell someone on a second thought I agreed. Or on a second thought I refused the offer etc. A second thought is an important aspect of our lives. Our second thoughts were given to us by God as a sort of watchdog over human activities. They are a sort of protective mechanism that sends out a warning signal against acting too quickly, speaking without thinking.

A mother sent her little girl to the store with strict orders to come straight back. When she was late returning, a worried mother asked her why. The girl responded that she had stopped to help her friend fix a broken doll. When the mother asked how she could fix a broken doll, she replied on a second thought, I just hugged her and helped her to cry.

Sooner or later the spiritual journey we make as followers of Jesus Christ leads us to a Jericho Road. The Jerusalem-Jericho Road of Jesus' day was the scene of one of the most compelling stories our Lord ever told. But spiritually speaking, those who are serious about following Jesus Christ are going to find themselves on a Jericho Road, confronted by the same choices that faced the people in our Lord's story long ago. Four travelers made their way down that shortcut from Jerusalem to Jericho.

First, we have the man who was robbed. He knew well it was a dangerous path yet, he risked it and got hurt. There are times we too take dangerous paths knowing well we can be hurt. Nevertheless, we take it for various reasons. Next, we have the priest. I am not excusing the priest, the second traveler on the road that day. Someday he will have to answer to God for why a person who spent his whole life proclaiming a message of love, simply walked by the wounded person in the ditch. He was so pre-occupied with his obligations, he walked away without a second thought.

But I have come to have a real sympathy for the Levite, the third of the travelers on the road to Jericho that day. In those days Levites were assistants to the priests. More like the Deacons of today. They were not clergy, but they helped with the Temple sacrifices. Now he too passed by the person in need, but somehow, I feel certain he did so only after a terrible struggle with his "second thoughts."

I see this Levite in my mind, journeying along the road. Suddenly, he is startled by a moan from the lips of the man who had been mugged. Instinctively, he stops! He starts across the road to help! And then, I see him pause, and in that introspective interval, an army of "second thoughts" pounces on him! When he heard the cry of pain, a worthy thought was born in his heart; but alas, it died there because of his second thoughts. He began to wonder about the whole thing being a clever trap. He began to ponder whether he was really willing to get that involved in another person's problem. Those second thoughts finally won out, as they so often do, and after hesitating in the middle of the road, he too passed by on the other side.

Now we have the fourth person the Good Samaritan. He is the one who stopped and was moved by compassion for the wounded traveler. But he too must have paused, just as the Levite did, wondering if this whole scene was nothing but a clever trap. The Samaritan may have been a person in a hurry. He was on a business trip. Maybe he had an important client to meet. A business deal to be signed. But on a second thought, he stopped and helped.

In this story, then, Jesus is answering a question he was not asked, namely, **who are God's people?** And the answer Jesus gives is the good Samaritans of this world, the people who embody, in acts of loving kindness, the compassion and care of the God of love. In this story, then, Jesus is challenging the lawyer, as he is challenging us, to look beyond the narrow frontiers of our official Religious Traditions, with their divisions and exclusions, and embrace the universal reign of God's love, from which no one is excluded. The lawyer in today's gospel reading may not be far from the kingdom of God for, when asked by Jesus, he acknowledges that, of the three characters in Jesus' story – the Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan – it is the Samaritan who proves himself a neighbor to the unfortunate victim of violent robbery. The reading ends with Jesus inviting him, as he is also inviting us, to imitate the example of genuine neighborliness.

The Good Samaritan parable is also saying that even today with so much terror and conflict, so much hunger and persecution, there are caring people willing to love and give selflessly. **In our society too there are three categories of people. There are those who just pass by not bothered. There are those who look helplessly at the suffering afraid to help and finally those who risk their lives for their neighbor.**

All of us at one time or another have experienced the three different situations. There are times when we have experienced the help of a good Samaritan. I know I have several times. There are times we have neglected a second thought to help the needy. There are times when we paid attention to our second thoughts and stopped to help. What Jesus says as conclusion to the parable is most important. **'You have answered right. Do this and life is yours.'** *The words of our last judgment come alive today. "When I was hungry, you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me a drink. When I was sick or in prison, you visited me."* Enter into my Father's Home. May we all hear these words from the lips of our Lord.

God Bless You.