

15c

Little Jenny was being taught that the proper thing to do was to write a 'thank you' letter to those persons who sent her gifts at Christmas. She seemed to do pretty well until it came to Aunt Martha's gift. Finally she finished her note which read: 'Thank you, Auntie Martha, for your Christmas present. I always wanted a pin-cushion, although not very much.'

Could we be a bit like that? We all want to love our neighbour although 'not very much' - certainly not like the Good Samaritan.

Jerusalem is 800 meters above sea level and Jericho is 400 meters below, so it's downhill all the way. Jerusalem was God's city whereas Jericho was quite a worldly place, hot as hell in summer and a playground for the rich and famous in winter. So, the man was going in the wrong direction - away from God. And if our life is taking us away from God we are likely to run into big trouble as well, but this is where the Good Samaritan enters the scene.

When I was going to school the old catechism answer to the question: 'Who is my neighbour' was: '*My neighbour is all mankind, even those who injure me or differ from me in religion*'. And that was long before we heard of ecumenism or multiculturalism.

The priest passed by on the other side because the law said he would incur ritual impurity to touch a dead body and so couldn't perform his duties. Being in love with the Law, he overlooked the law of love. Do we ever step outside our comfort zone or line of duty to help those in difficult situations and at our own expense?

Also, Jews and Samaritans didn't speak to each other. Some Jews even regarded Samaritans as Devil worshippers. But Jesus, the Jew, seemed to have a soft spot for the Samaritans. On one occasion, for instance, we find him sitting at a well, in deep conversation with a Samaritan woman - much to the dismay of His apostles. On another occasion He praises the Samaritan leper who returns to thank Him, unlike the other nine Jews

who take their healing for granted.

The Samaritan was 'moved with compassion' when he saw the man. If compassion were the common denominator in all religions then every person would be my neighbour regardless of what religion or ethnic group they belonged to. I suppose this is very relevant today with migrants and refugees on our doorstep. It was also a decisive factor in the Brexit vote.

Actually the deeper meaning of the parable is that Jesus Himself is the Good Samaritan. In the story, soothing oil and wine were poured on the man's wounds. But Jesus has gone further. He has poured out his blood for all mankind in order to heal us of the wounds which our sins have incurred. The Samaritan paid in full for the man's medical expenses. Jesus has paid for our sins with His life.

The parable invites all of us to see the world through the compassionate eyes of Jesus and be propelled into action. For those who believe in God, passing by on the other side is never an option.