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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.'

We are a bit like that. We all want to love our neighbour although not very much - certainly not with the same willingness as 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 travelling in the wrong direction and alone putting himself at some risk. His life was going downhill - away from Jerusalem, the City of God. And if our lives are taking us away from God we are prone to run into serious trouble as well.

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 Jewish law said he would incur ritual impurity to touch a dead body and so couldn't perform his priestly 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 individuals in dire straits? That's exactly what the Good Samaritan did.

Also the Jews shunned the Samaritans because they interbred with non-Jews centuries before. Jesus, the Jew, cuts through

all of this. He wasn't one to be blinded or bound by long-standing prejudices. Unlike the Jews in general at the time, Jesus seems to have got along well with the Samaritan people. On one occasion, for instance, we find him sitting at a well, in deep conversation with a Samaritan woman of doubtful reputation - much to the dismay of His apostles. On another occasion He praises the Samaritan leper because he was the only one, out of the ten Jesus healed, to return and give thanks to God.

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 or class they belonged to.

Actually, it's Jesus Himself who is the Good Samaritan *par excellence*. In the story soothing oil and wine were poured on the injured 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 of sin which we have incurred on our life's journey. Unlike the Levi and the priest, he doesn't pass us by.

The story of the Good Samaritan is an invitation to see the world through the compassionate eyes of Jesus and not let fear, prejudice, or even the law get in the way. For the true believer in Jesus passing by on the other side is not an option.