

The Good Samaritan - Timothy RADCLIFFE

A Study Topic based on talks given at the International Gathering in Brasilia, July 2012

This is my first encounter with your organisation. I wish that I knew more about you, your hopes and challenges, so as to prepare better. I am reminded of one of my brethren who gave a lecture in Chicago. When he sat down the applause was not very enthusiastic. He turned to the man beside him and said, 'I hope that it was not that bad.' And the man replied, 'Oh, I do not blame you at all. I just blame whoever asked you to speak in the first place.' I have read many of the documents that you have prepared for this meeting and I have learned a lot. You are at the forefront of thinking about some questions which are urgent for the whole Church.

At the heart of your vocation is a belief that marriage is a beautiful Christian vocation and an essential part of any human society. But you are deeply aware that many people find marriage difficult. It is often a place of suffering, misunderstanding and even of violence. Also, more and more people are not married. Many people often cohabit and raise children without even thinking about marriage. Millions of people are divorced and remarried. There are also same-sex unions.

A big question for many of you, then, is how to be faithful to your original charism, and yet face the reality of so many people's lives. You are committed to marriage and yet you all have friends, family and maybe children whose lives have taken another direction. What is your mission to them? How can you reach out to them to share your love of marriage without making them feel excluded? These are vast questions for the whole Church. And it is a blessing that you dare to pose these questions explicitly. I must be honest. I do not have any simple answers, but at least I hope that we can have a discussion that is honest and hopeful. Veritas, truth, is the motto of the Dominican Order, and all gospel truth is hopeful.

You have also asked me to look at these questions in the light of the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is a challenge, because the parable does not directly touch upon divorce or gay marriage! But it is a profound exploration of the meaning of love and so it can help us in our search for a way forward.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbour as yourself.'" 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.' But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have." "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37 (NIV)

Meeting 1 - Conversation

The parable is part of a conversation. The lawyer asks Jesus how he is to inherit eternal life, and Jesus replies with the commandment to love God, his neighbour and himself. The lawyer then asks who is his neighbour. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, ending with another question: 'Which of these three was neighbour to the man who fell among thieves?' The lawyer replies, and then Jesus replies to him again: 'Go and do likewise.' It is a true conversation by which Jesus helps the lawyer towards the truth.

All Christian teaching involves conversation. The word 'homily' comes from a word which means 'conversation.' This is because the life of God is the eternal conversation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Word of God, inviting us to enter the loving conversation of the Trinity. By its very nature, Christian truth cannot be imposed from above. It is God's word inviting our response. St Dominic founded the Order of Preachers as the fruit of a conversation with an innkeeper, which lasted all night. He could not have spent the whole night saying 'You are wrong, you are wrong.' Conversation implies acceptance of the other person.

You are faced with the question: What can you say to people who are cohabiting, or divorced or remarried, or gay? What can you say that is both open to the truth of their lives and yet is faithful to the Church's teaching? You will only discover if you enter into conversation. You will speak with authority if you give authority to their experience. If you listen to them, and put yourself in their shoes, feel with their skin, then perhaps the Lord will give you the right word.

People often tried to trap Jesus by asking him impossible questions. For example, 'Should we pay taxes to the Romans?' If he says Yes then he is a collaborator, but if he says No, he is a rebel. 'Should we stone this woman caught in adultery or not?' If he says Yes, he is merciless, and if he says No, he rejects the law. Sometimes that is our experience too. If we affirm strongly our commitment to marriage then we seem to exclude the millions whose lives have taken another direction. If we do not affirm marriage, then we betray something vital to the Christian life. Like Jesus, we may feel that we are in an impossible quandary!

But Jesus always finds a way forward. This is because God's grace creates a new space, in which he can be both merciful and faithful. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, we must dare to enter into conversation with people whose lives are complex, and pray that we shall find a word from God. An unexpected word, a new word, which is also the eternal word of love. To hear that word we have to dare to listen: listen to God who is love; listen to the Church, and to listen with an open heart and mind to those whose lives are not like our own.

Conversation also tells us something about sexual ethics. Sexual ethics is not just about what is forbidden or permitted. It is not fundamentally about rules. Sex is not primarily a physical act. In true sexual love, the couple speak to each other. Each says to the other: 'This is my body given for you.'

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Each offers the other a word made flesh. The first question about any sexual act is not: 'Is it allowed?' But 'What does it say?'

If you have sex with someone and then leave early the next day, without any intention of seeing them again, then you have said something with your body that you deny with your life. The intrinsic meaning of the sexual act is a gift of the self. It is an act of communion and communication. So if you talk with a young couple who are cohabiting, the first thing is not to tell them that a sexual relationship is not allowed. It is to help them to see what it means, what it says. We invite people to discover the deep and beautiful meaning of our sexuality.

I believe that the foundation of all Christian sexual ethics is the Last Supper. In the face of suffering and death, Jesus gives himself to the disciples. This is my body, given for you. It was an act of fidelity, even when they were not faithful to him. 'I give myself to you forever'. It was an act of generosity. I give you all that I am. It was a moment of vulnerability, when he placed himself in their hands for them to do with him what they willed.

Sexual ethics teaches us how to live this fidelity, this generosity and vulnerability with each other. And so part of your mission is to help people to see the beauty of sexuality. Then they can search how to live these values in their own personal situation.

Discussion for Sit-down

Are you comfortable talking about your sexuality ?

Discussion for Team Meeting

Do you agree with Timothy Radcliffe's assertions ?

What can we say to people who are cohabiting, or divorced or remarried or gay ?

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Meeting 2 – ‘Who is my neighbour?’ (Luke 10.29)

The lawyer asks a question: ‘Who is my neighbour?’ He begins from himself. He wants to know the limits of his love. Jesus turns this question upside down with another: ‘Which of these three was neighbour to the man who fell among robbers?’ This is a love which has no limits, because you never know who will need you.

The lawyer’s question is literally self-centred. He sees the world from his point of view. The biggest challenge that we all face is to be liberated from this egoism. We begin this journey as a baby. The new-born baby is the centre of its own world. Growing up is the slow discovery there are other people and they do not exist just to do one’s will. Behind the breast there is a mother. Some of us remain egocentric. Noel Coward, the English playwright, met a friend he had not seen for many years and he said: ‘There is not time to talk about both of us, and so let’s talk about me.’ Once a well-known logician stayed at Blackfriars. He was wanted on the phone and so we all went to look for him. We found him in the kitchen and said ‘There you are.’ And he replied: ‘No. Here I am. There you are.’

The parable invites the lawyer to forget who he is and identify with the Samaritan, the hated enemy of the Jews. He must be freed from the narrow world of the lawyer, who lays down precise obligations. He must become a human being, a child of the Universal God. He must discover who he is with the one who needs him.

This tells us something profound about the nature of marriage. Legally it is a contract that binds together two human beings. Increasingly this contract is regarded as temporary. People negotiate prenuptial contracts in case the marriage collapses.

But in marriage, we promise to discover who we are with this other unknown person. A young friend of mine was married a couple of years ago. When they had their first child, it was a moment of revelation. When they looked at each other, they each saw someone they had never seen before, a mother and a father. When you marry and have children, the old solitary person whom you were before, dies. You will never be the same, which is why parents often suffer from postnatal depression. They must grieve for the solitary individual whom they were and who is no more.

At each stage of your married life, you will discover new aspects of who you are, and who is the person whom you married. When one of you faces sickness, then once again, you are both changed. If the other person gets depression or Alzheimer’s, then there is a new discovery to be made. To be married is to promise to carry on the voyage of discovery, being surprised by yourself and the other person. Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, talked of true friendship as ‘Holy Insecurity.’ You do not know what you become as you walk to Jericho.

You promise to let the other person go on being a surprise. After a while the temptation may be to think that you have got the other person worked out. You have heard every story of their childhood, you can anticipate their jokes, you know what they will order in the restaurant, and what they will forget to pack on holiday. But you promise to let them surprise you. You promise to be surprised by yourself!

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

So any true love invites us to let go of final self-definition. I do not know in advance who is the person to whom I must become a neighbour. Part of our Christian witness is not to worry who we are. When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was in prison, he was haunted by questions of his own identity. Finally he learned just to leave it in God's hands.

*'Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.'*

In your mission in this world of broken relationships, you can help people to have the courage to engage in this journey, letting go old self-definitions. People may cohabit because they are afraid of the risk of commitment. You can give them courage. If they are divorced and remarried, they may be afraid of being hurt again. We can invite them to undertake the adventure of love, daring to be more than we had thought. Herbert McCabe OP used to say: 'if you love you will be hurt and maybe even killed. If you do not love, then you are dead already.'

Discussion for the Sit-Down

Are we true neighbours to each other ?

Discussion for the Team Meeting

Share thoughts from your sit-downs.

How can we respond to Timothy Radcliffe's call in the last paragraph to support those in broken relationships ?

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Meeting 3 – ‘Take care of Him’ (Luke 10.35) - Fidelity

Let us focus on the next phrase:

‘He went up to him and bound up his wounds, pouring oil upon them he set him upon his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.”’

In this text we see what is central to any love and also to sexual ethics: fidelity, generosity, and the healing of wounds. We shall now look at these. This is what we have to learn within our marriages, and offer to people who are in other relationships.

First of all, let us look at fidelity. At the Last Supper, Jesus gave his body to us forever. It does not matter that the disciples will not be faithful to him; he will always be faithful to us. If love is the life of God, then love must be eternal. Marriage is a sacrament of God’s faithful love because it is ‘for better and worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part’. And we believe that the intrinsic meaning of giving your body to someone else is that you are given forever. Is this a remote and impossible ideal?

It is very far from what many people see as the meaning of sex today, often just a pleasurable activity. What can we say to people who are divorced and remarried? It is not helpful to confront them with the failure of their previous marriages. None of us can judge. Any of us could have found ourselves in the same situation. So what can we say about fidelity in love?

The disciples were not faithful on Good Friday. In the court of the High Priest, Peter denied Jesus: ‘I know not the man.’ Most of the other disciples ran away. Jesus gave himself to those who were not at the beginning faithful. They have to learn slowly how to be faithful. Peter took a long time to become a rock. On the beach, Jesus forgives him his failure, but he still has to learn. According to an early legend, Peter was fleeing Rome during a time of persecution and he met Jesus going the other way. He asked Jesus, ‘Where are you going?’ Quo Vadis? The spot is marked today by an expensive restaurant which poor Dominicans cannot afford to visit. And Jesus replied, ‘I am going to die a second time.’ So Peter turned around and went to face death. Finally, at the end of a long period, he became a faithful person. It took him his whole life.

So fidelity is not something that you just have or do not have. People who are in a second or a third relationship can still, like Peter, learn the virtue of fidelity to another person. We all slowly learn to be faithful people. Fidelity is much more than not committing adultery, though that is part of it. It is being faithful to the truth of the other person. Though an academic said that one could be too truthful. He said to his wife, who was looking a little tired in the morning: ‘My dear you are beautiful in the morning.’ And she replied, ‘What about the rest of the day?’

Fidelity is being attentive to what they live, the small signs of disappointment or unhappiness, learning how to unlock their joy, understand their fears and not judge their failures. All of this is fidelity, and all of us are slowly learning it.

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

We need to learn fidelity in all our friendships, for every friendship is a share in God's eternal love. Fidelity to our parents when they are old; fidelity to our children, even if they run away from us; fidelity to our friends even if they divorce and remarry for the fourth time; faithful to the Church even when we are disappointed in it, and wish to criticise it. Members of the church are called 'the faithful.' Any true love is always forever. So part of what we can learn within our marriages, and bring to a world of broken relationships, is the virtue of fidelity. It is never too late to begin again, as did Peter.

Jesus knows that he is being handed over to his enemies by Judas, and that he will be betrayed by Peter and that other disciples will wish to have nothing to do with him. He takes their betrayal and makes it into a gift. This is my body given for you. You will give me away to the Romans, and pretend to have nothing to do with me. But I transform your handing over, into gift. This is the supreme generosity of divine love.

Faced with betrayals in our relationships, do we live that supreme generosity? If the other person fails, do we assert our own moral superiority? Will we use their failures to gain the upper hand? But Jesus did not. He made their failure a moment of grace. He made it the moment of a new and deeper intimacy. There was no reproach.

I have not talked in this section about the parable of the Good Samaritan because he is not going to marry the man who had been beaten by the robbers! But even so he embodies a sort of fidelity. He discovers the man and cares for him.

Discussion for Sit-Down

Is it easy to be faithful to each other ?

Discussion for the Team Meeting

In this day and age is life-long fidelity a remote and impossible ideal ?

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Meeting 4 – ‘Take Care of Him’ (Luke 10.35) – healing the wounds

The Good Samaritan discovers the man and cares for him, and then he leaves him at the inn and goes his own way, promising to come back again. He shows love for the man but each of them must live their own lives. He draws close to the man in his emergency, and yet he lets him be.

God’s love inhabits this same dynamism of closeness and letting be. For us to exist is to be loved by a love which is utterly intimate and yet which gives us the space to be ourselves. Our loving is a tiny sharing in that divine love that sustains us at the core of our being and lets us be.

St Augustine said that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. To discover God, we make the journey inwards, and discover him as the pulse that sustains us in being. At the core of my being I am not alone. I am loved into being at every moment. God is closer to us than our husband or wife.

And yet God lets us be. God says, ‘Let there be light’ and there is light. Herbert McCabe wrote: ‘Creation is simply and solely letting things be, and our love is a faint image of that¹.’ God does not jump up and down in front of us saying, ‘Hey, look at me. I love you.’ God is incredibly discreet. You might even not notice that God is there at all.

Our faithful love surely needs to learn some combination of intimacy and letting the other person breathe. Herbert wrote, ‘What gives us elbow room, what gives us space to grow and become ourselves, is the love that comes to us from another. Love is the space in which to expand, and it is always a gift....To give love is to give the precious gift of nothing, space. To give love is to let be.’¹

St Thomas Aquinas wrote that ‘in love the two become one but remain distinct.’ The art of loving knows when to be one and when to be two, when to be close and when to give space. Sometimes I may want intimacy, but the other person needs to breath. Or maybe, I want to be alone, but I see that the other person is longing for a hug. True love is in being open to what the other needs in that moment. Sometimes teenagers going through a difficult time do not know what they want. If you hug them, they will say ‘Leave me alone.’ And if you do, they will say ‘No one loves me.’ Nothing is right. And loving them will mean enduring that difficult time of confusion!

It will be the same in your mission to people with wounded relationships. You will have to discover when to be close and to offer intimacy, and when to hold back and not intrude. This implies great sensitivity, so that you read their faces and understand their body language.

A last word on violence: The Samaritan leaves the security of Jerusalem and ventures into the violent world, where he finds a man who is left for dead. Your mission carries you too into a violent world, where you will meet many wounded people.

All our relationships are marked by wounds. Within marriages there are wounds of disappointment: He forgot the anniversary of our marriage again! Also wounds of infidelity, wounds of violent words or aggressive silence, even literal physical wounds of domestic abuse. People in other relationships will also have wounds - wounds from earlier relationships that went wrong; wounds of uncertainty. Gay people will suffer from the wounds of non-acceptance, of prejudice, perhaps rejection by their

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

families. If we are to offer healing to them, then we must face our own wounds, and become people who enjoy God's own shalom.

There is a close relationship between violence and sex. Much sex is deformed by violence. In the Old Testament, we see King David taking Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, by force, and then having her husband murdered. Today we see the violence of rape in war zones like the Congo, the violence of the abuse of children, the violence of prostitution.

Let me quote myself: 'The Last Supper teaches us that the heart of Christian sexual ethics is the renunciation of violence. We seek mutuality and equality. When someone desires the body of another person, then that desire should not be rapacious, seeking to take possession of the body, as if it were a piece of meat to be devoured. We must learn to desire in a way that delights in the other, that treasures their vulnerability, that takes pleasure in their very existence. We must delight in another as God delights in us, tenderly and without dominion. In so far as there is a taking possession, then it is to be mutual. As St Paul said, 'For the wife does not rule over her own body but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.' (I Corinthians 7.4).² If we are to reach out to people in the world of wounded relationships, then we must dare to look for any violence in our own marriages, whether hurtful words, contempt, or even violence in our sexuality. Then we shall be able, like the risen Lord, to say to other people, wounded people, 'Peace be with you.'

There is also the great wound of poverty. Thanks be to God, Brazil is becoming an economic powerhouse and millions of people have been freed from poverty. But still our world is wounded by terrible inequalities of wealth, with more than a billion people in acute poverty. Poverty is destructive of marriage. If you are poor, then you may have to travel far to find work, and workers are often separated from their families and children. Unemployment is destructive of family life. A survey in Britain showed recently, that unemployed men usually received enormous sympathy and support from their wives for about six weeks. And then the man begins to lose confidence in himself, and finally the esteem of the wife. And so to love and promote marriage implies also the fight against poverty, and opposition to the growing inequalities of our world.

You face a profound challenge, and it is a challenge for the whole Church: How can you be faithful to your spirituality of marriage, and yet have a mission to our broken world, in which so many people live in other relationships: cohabiting, divorced and remarried, gay? What mission do you have in this world of wounded and broken relationships?

We saw that Jesus converses with the lawyer. All Christian mission implies conversation in which we both speak and listen, teach and learn. If we dare to listen, to God, the Church and those who are hurting, then the Lord will give us a word which is both faithful and new. The parable also suggests some ways forward. Any love summons us beyond any established identity. We have to let go our previous self-definitions. We are all called to become faithful lovers. This is a challenge for us, even those whose marriages are strong. We must learn to be vulnerable, taking the risk of getting hurt, as Jesus did, but hopeful that every human being, whatever they have done, is on the way to a love beyond all our imagining. When we heal our own marriages of all violence, then we shall be bearers of Christ's peace.

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Discussion for the sit-down

Do we have wounds which we can talk about ?

Discussion for the Team Meeting

Discuss the wounds of violence and poverty and their impact on others.

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Meeting 5 - He saw him (Luke 10.33)

The Good Samaritan sees the man lying by the road and has compassion. The priest and the Levite do not really see him. They see a problem, someone who will destroy their ritual purity perhaps, or who will delay their return home to their families.

Jesus is someone whose eyes are open. He sees Nathaniel under the fig tree, and that he is a man without guile (John 1.48). He sees the despised tax collector Levi hidden in the crowd, and sees a disciple (Mark 2.14). He spots Zacchaeus up the sycamore tree and sees a friend (Luke 19.5). He sees the widow putting into the treasury her little coins (Mark 12.42) and her vast generosity. The priest and the Levite see from the outside. They see someone in terms of their own preoccupations. Jesus sees from the inside. He sees the goodness and hidden beauty of people. He sees them as created by God, as gifts.

How do we learn to see with the eyes of Jesus and the Good Samaritan? This can take time. When Jesus healed the man born blind (Mark 8.22ff), he needed two goes. After the first attempt the man did not see people but trees walking. Sometimes I feel that is where I am at!

A first step may be to see the person to whom you are married! When you fell in love, then you gazed into each other's eyes with adoration! You are astonished at their beauty and goodness. How could she or he possibly love me! But after a few years of marriage, some people stop looking too closely. We become a little blind. Perhaps we think that we know them so well, that it is no longer necessary to look! And so we miss the signs of unhappiness, the desire for tenderness, the unspoken word on their lips. And so when suddenly someone leaves a marriage, the other person is often surprised. They never saw the crisis coming because they had stopped looking!

Fear can make us blind. We are afraid to see that we do not matter so much. Jealousy made Othello blind, and so he could no longer see his wife and her love for him. Guilt may make us unable to look the other person in the eyes.

Seeing is not a matter of looking intensely, placing them under a microscope. We may see best when we look out of the corner of the eye, and glimpse their utter humanity. Look at them when they are asleep and all their defences are down. In India it is said that when we sleep our face 'is the friend of the world'.³

Pope Benedict has often stressed the link between love and truth. Your gaze is only truthful if it is loving, and only really loving if it attends to the truth of the other person. When did you last really see your husband or wife?

The big concern that many of you have expressed is how to reach out to people in broken or uncommitted relationships. Do not look at them as a problem to be solved! For example, this young couple who are cohabiting must get married! This divorced and remarried couple must get an annulment. We must fix it! Jesus is not a problem solver.

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Before we have anything to say, we must see what is good in people's love, even if their situation is not the ideal proposed by the Church. We must not look at them as failures but as on the journey to the fullness of love, just like us. We must not be like the man who was asked the way to Dublin. He said that if he wanted to go to Dublin he would not start here! But wherever people are, whatever the mess and the wounds, they are able to begin again the journey towards God.

The biggest challenge is to see people whom we think of as enemies. During the revolution in Nicaragua, an American Dominican helped a young group of Nicaraguans to enact the parable of the Good Samaritans during Mass. They showed how a young Nicaraguan was beaten up and left half dead by the road. A Dominican friar went by and ignored him. Then a delegate of the word passed by as well. And then one of the enemy, a 'contra', came by wearing a military uniform. He stopped, put a rosary around the neck of the Nicaraguan, gave him water and carried him to the next village. At this point, half of the congregation began to shout and protest. It was unacceptable that a contra could do this. They are terrible people. 'We have nothing to do with them'. The Mass broke up in chaos. Then the people began to discuss what the parable meant. Because they had been shocked, they came to understand it more deeply. Do we register how shocking is this parable?

Finally we must learn to see the poor, who are often invisible in our society. Celebrities are visible everywhere. Everyone looks at the rich. Just before the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus turns to the disciples and says, 'Blessed are the eyes which see what you see' (10.23). The eyes of the saints see the poor. Mother Teresa of Calcutta went to a party in her honour in Rome. It was filled with important dignitaries, ambassadors and Cardinals. At the door she stopped to talk to a beggar. On and on they talked. Finally someone came and said, 'Mother, their excellencies are waiting to meet you.' And she replied, 'Can't you see that I am talking to Christ?'

Discussion for your sit-down

Do you really see each other ?

Discussion for the Team Meeting

Do you have relatives or friends who have problems with their marriages, and do you agree with Timothy Radcliffe that they did not really "see" each other ?

How should we respond to those in broken or uncommitted relationships ?

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Meeting 6 – He had compassion (Luke 10.33)

The Samaritan saw the man lying by the roadside and he had compassion. It means literally that his intestines were touched. He was moved at the core of his being. The word 'compassion' means to feel with someone. It is good to feel for someone. That is part of compassion, but alone it can be patronizing and condescending. I must also feel with them, honouring how they feel, and how they see things.

So these are the two sides of compassion: I must see the person as a fellow human being, my brother or sister. I must also learn to see them as unlike me, as fruit of their unique experience, which I cannot know totally. Two days ago, when I talked of love, I said that it implies that we draw close to other people in intimacy, but also that we give them space to be themselves. The Samaritan draws close but he also leaves the wounded man at the inn, to get on with his own life.

Brazil was the country of the great Helder Camera, the holy Archbishop of Recife. He is a wonderful example of compassion in that first sense. He was often accused of being a communist because of his concern for the poor who live in the favelas on the hills around the city. He said: 'If I do not go up the hills into their favelas to greet them as my brothers and sisters, then they will come from the hills into the cities with flags and guns'

Sometimes, when Helder Camera heard that a poor man had been taken by the police, he would ring up the police and say, 'I hear that you have arrested my brother'. And the police would be very apologetic. 'Your Excellency, what a terrible mistake! We did not know he was your brother. He will be released at once!' And when the Archbishop would go to the police station to collect the man, the police might say, 'But your Excellency, he does not have the same family name as you.' And Camera would reply that every poor person was his brother and sister.

To love another is to see them as like you, a fellow human being. Augustine said that the friend is 'another me'. He wrote: 'I agree with the poet who called his friend "the half of his own soul." For I felt that my soul and my friend's had been one soul in two bodies.' When we reach out to people in broken relationships, or cohabiting or divorced and remarried, we see ourselves in their position. We identify with them and know that we could easily be in their situation.

The other side of true compassion is the acceptance that the other person is not like me. The other person is unique and I cannot know exactly their suffering. It is very irritating if you are in pain and someone says to you: 'I know exactly what you are feeling.' Maybe you have lost someone you love, or are enduring physical pain, and you want to say: 'No, you do not! You are not me!' My suffering is not exactly the same as anyone else's. You have never lost my wife or husband! You do not know what it is like for me to face death. True compassion also honours their otherness, the mystery of their being.

How can we grow in that reverence for the other person? In the last section, I wrote about how we look at other people. We pray to see with the eyes of Jesus. But Jesus also lets himself be seen. On the cross he is naked before our eyes. His eyes pierce through all our disguises, but he has the

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

courage to let us see him too, even as dead on the cross when he cannot look back. He entrusts himself to our gaze.

True compassion means that we look at people with love but we also let ourselves be seen. If we only look, then we are claiming some superiority. In the early church, at baptism we were stripped of our clothes. We stepped into the font naked and without shame. We did not need to hide from the gaze of God, like Adam and Eve after the fall. Now we can face God as we are. Gregory of Nyssa wrote: *'Casting off these fading leaves which veil our lives we should once again present ourselves before the eyes of our Maker'⁴.*

In a marriage, or even religious life, you learn the mutuality of compassion. We let ourselves be touched by what the other person lives. We look at them with our eyes open. But we must also dare to let ourselves be seen by our spouse. We do not need to hide our weakness, our doubts, insecurity. We even have to be literally naked with another, and that demands great trust, especially as we grow older, and more flabby!

We trust that they will look at us with mercy and understanding. Do we fear that if our spouse saw us as we really are, they might not love us anymore? Do you feel driven to erect a facade that will win admiration, rather than to trust in their compassionate love for us? God sees us as we are, and loves us more than anyone else.

One day I was taken to visit a vast rubbish tip outside Kingston, Jamaica, which was the home to the most destitute people. And I spotted a sort of primitive shack, almost a big cardboard box. And when I was near a mother and her young son emerged. They invited me inside, and offered me a Coke they had, I assumed, found on the tip, and her son offered to swap T shirts. I was deeply moved. I kept that T shirt for years. It seems to have rather shrunk. It was not just that I saw them, but they saw me, I existed in their eyes, was invited into their home. We looked at each other. Without this mutuality, even compassion can be patronizing and even dominating.

Discussion of the Sit-down

Do we allow ourselves to be seen, or do we erect a facade ?

Discussion for the Team Meeting

Share on how you have shown compassion, or have received compassion from others, over the last month.

Have you been out of your comfort zone, and was it hard to show/receive compassion ?

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Meeting 7 - 'Take care of him. I will pay on my return.' (Luke 10.35)

I imagine that the Samaritan had planned his day. He had everything necessary for the journey, his money, the wine, oil and bread. And then he saw the wounded man by the road and he had compassion and his plans were thrown into disarray. He probably had to use his clothes to bandage him. The oil and the wine had to be used for his wounds, and the money given to the innkeeper. He promised money that he did not yet have: 'Take care of him and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

There is a saying in English: 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.' Love disrupts the careful plans that we make for our lives. If we love, then we must, in a sense, lose control of our lives, because we cannot predict in advance what love will ask of us. A French Dominican came to stay with my community in Oxford. He learned Bengali, so that he could share his life with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. I was a student at the time and I asked what he intended to do for them. He replied, 'How can I know until they tell me?'

I expect that many of you have seen the film *Des hommes et des dieux*. It is the true story of a small community of Trappist monks who lived in the Atlas mountains in Algeria. They were deeply embedded in the local Muslim village. Then they found themselves caught up in the escalating violent clashes between the terrorists and the army. They had to decide whether to stay or go. They knew that if they stayed, then they would certainly be killed. When they had established the community, they never guessed that their vocation would demand their death. One of the younger monks says to the Prior, 'But I did not become a monk in order to die.' And the Prior replies 'But you have already given away your life.' They were beheaded on May 21st 1996. This was the unexpected demand of love.

You know this already in your marriages. When you give yourself to each other in love, you do not know beforehand what it will cost. I had dinner with a friend and his wife. She is now lost in the fog of Alzheimer's. When they were newly married and young, they never could have imagined that his love must become so deep, so stretched, that he would care for her when she no longer always remembers who he is. When Joseph was betrothed to Mary, he could not have known that this would involve raising someone who was not his son, the Saviour of the world.

Our society finds the unpredictability of love frightening, which is why many couples sign prenuptial agreements. We fear to take risks. A Canadian historian of ideas, Charles Taylor, has argued that after the sixteenth century we see the rise of the culture of control. When people ceased to believe in God's gentle providence, then we had to take control of the world. Everything must be managed, assessed, controlled. Even the Church is often tempted by the culture of control! But love demands more than we know in advance and gives more than we can imagine. Does this mean that we must surrender *all* control of our lives? Must we become passive people, prisoners of others, at the mercy of circumstances? Do our lives lose all direction, as we respond to what happens? No, because the deepest freedom is to give your life away. Jesus is the freest person that there has ever been. And his great act of freedom was to give himself to us without reserve. 'For freedom he has set us free!' (Galatians 5.1) This is the freedom of marriage, to risk giving yourself to another person. The person

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

who does not dare to take that risk but is always keeping control of everything is the prisoner of his fear.

It is the same thing in religious life. We are called to live this uncertainty with joy. One of my close friends in the Order is a French Dominican called Jean Jacques. He was trained as an economist, went to Algeria to study irrigation, learned Arabic, taught in the University there. It was tough but he was profoundly content. And then one day his Provincial phoned to ask him to come back to France to be student master. He was utterly thrown; he grieved, and then he remembered the joy of having given his life away without condition. So he went and bought a bottle of champagne to celebrate his freedom with his friends. A few years later I was elected to be Master of the Order and I was desperate to have someone in the General Council whom I knew. I tracked down Jean Jacques and asked him to come. He asked if he could think about it. So I said yes. He asked if he could take a month. I asked him to take a day. He said yes. More champagne! The champagne of freedom.

It belongs to your mission to encourage people to take the risk of love. Maybe young people cohabit sometimes because they fear to make that commitment. Or people in second or third relationships fear to be hurt again, and want to keep complete control of their lives.

Let us encourage each other to have the courage to let God upset our plans!

Discussion for the Sit-down

Share on your plans for the future – do they make God laugh ?

Discussion for the Team Meeting

Are there occasions when you have had to stop what you were doing in order to help someone ?

Do we have the courage to allow God to upset our plans ?

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

Meeting 8 - 'Go and do likewise' (Luke 10.38)

So far this study has been filled with words. You have had to read my boring words, and, I hope, exchanged more interesting words with each other. But the last words that we look at invite us to pass from words to deeds. 'Go and do likewise'. Let the word become flesh.

An experiment was carried out in New York. A group of seminarians were asked to prepare a homily on the parable of the Good Samaritan, as part of learning how to preach. They prepared their texts in one building and then had to walk down the street to a studio, where it was recorded on video. An actor was dressed up as a wounded man lying on the pavement covered with blood, begging for help. 80% of them walked past him and did not even see him. They studied the parable and even composed beautiful words about it, but they could walk by the wounded man and ignore him.

Cardinal Martini famously said to you: *'Although the teams of Our Lady are not a movement of action, they want to be a movement of active people.'*⁵ What stops us from acting? Maybe, faced with the suffering of the world, we feel inadequate. What difference can little me make? Mahatma Gandhi said: 'Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is important that you do it.' Each of us is given our small deed. With the grace of God, it may change the world.

Think of Rosa Parks, a black American, who in 1955 refused to give up her seat to a white person on a bus. A tiny act, decided in a moment, shook the world and had a part in destroying racial segregation. An Irish Dominican, Herbert McCabe, was travelling in South Africa in the time of apartheid, when white people sat in front of the bus and black people had to sit in the back. Herbert deliberately went and sat on a seat in the back, and he was challenged by the ticket collector: 'You can't sit there.' 'Why not?' 'Because you are white.' He replied: 'I'm not white; I'm Irish.'

Some people blame the hierarchy of the Church. If only the Church were different, then I could do something. If the Church recognised the role of the laity, then we could act. But think of St Catherine of Siena in the fourteenth century. She was faced with a Church which was split down the middle, with the Pope living in exile in Avignon, and so she went and told the Pope what to do! She said to Raymond of Capua, the Master of the Dominican Order, that with the fire of divine love, 'we shall become doers rather than undoers and spoilers.'⁶ Many of the people who have transformed the Church, like Sts Benedict and Francis, were not ordained. Transformation usually comes from the people of God.

Often our temptation is not to act but to react. My wife wants to watch a film on the television and so I decide that I want to watch the football. Not because I really want to but just so that she knows that I have got wishes too. Or we act out of fear like the priest and Levite, who did not dare to touch the wounded man.

Acting well is rooted in letting the word that God has spoken germinate in our hearts. God has spoken a word of grace and it will come to fruition. God says in Isaiah: *'so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.'* (Isaiah 55.11, NIV)

The Good Samaritan – Timothy Radcliffe

God's word cannot be frustrated. Love and life will have the victory. If we attend to God's active word, and let it work in our hearts, then we shall discover what it is that we are given to do.

St Thomas Aquinas said something wonderful. He said that we act morally when we act 'as intelligent beings, endowed with free will and as the source of our own actions.' We must claim our freedom, to be the sources of our own actions. We act well, when we act from the very core of our own being, because that is where God is, making us strong. God does not want his sons and daughters to be wimps!

So your mission in this world of broken relationships is to help people become actors, the sources of their own actions. Often the temptation is to think of ourselves as victims. There is even competition as to who is the greatest victim. It is easy to claim to be the victim of our partner's failures, or of our parents, or our genes. Jesus was the truly innocent victim, but he was free!

Jesus says, '*Go and do likewise.*' Not 'go and to the same.' He does not tell the lawyer what he must do. This he must discover. It will be unexpected, but if we let the word of God germinate in our hearts, then eventually we shall discover. May God give us the courage to do it!

Discussion for the Sit-Down

What stops us from acting ?

Discussion for the Team Meeting

Is our team a team of active people ?

What stops us from responding with compassion ?

Has this course of study challenged your attitudes ?

References

¹ Herbert McCabe, *God Matters*, 108ff

² Lytta Basset, Eric Fassin and Timothy Radcliffe, *Christians and Sexuality in the Time of Aids*, London 2007 p.62

³ Gregory David Roberts, *Shantaram* p.165

⁴ *De Virginitate* XIII 1,15f, quoted Simon Tugwell OP, *The Way of the Preacher*, London, 1979 p.92.

⁵ *Gathering of the Italian Sector couples* 1988

⁶ Mary O'Driscoll OP, *Catherine of Siena: Passion for Truth and Compassion for Humanity*, New York 1993 p.48