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“Life is made up of encounters”

In his 28 May general audience, Pope Leo XIV continued the catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, speaking about the parable of the good Samaritan.

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Dear brothers and sisters,

We will continue to meditate on some parables of the Gospel, which are an opportunity to change perspective and open ourselves up to

hope. The lack of hope, at times, is due to the fact that we fixate on a certain rigid and closed way of seeing things, and the parables help us to look at them from another point of view.

Today I would like to talk to you about an expert, knowledgeable person, a doctor of the Law, who however needs to change his perspective, because he is concentrated on himself and does not notice others (cf. *Lk 10:25-37*). Indeed, he questions Jesus on the way in which eternal life is “inherited,” using an expression that intends it as an unequivocal right. But behind this question perhaps it is precisely the need for attention that is concealed: the only word he asks Jesus to explain is the term “neighbour,” which literally means *he who is near*.

Jesus therefore tells a parable that is a path for transforming that question, to pass from *who loves me?* to *who has loved?* The first is an immature question, the second is the question of an adult who has understood the meaning of his life. The first question is the one we ask when we sit in the corner and wait, the second is the one that drives us to set out on the path.

The parable that Jesus tells has, in fact, a road as its setting, and it is a difficult and impervious road, like life. It is the road travelled by a man going down from Jerusalem, the city on the mountain, to Jericho, the city below sea level. It is an image that already foreshadows what might happen: it happens that the man is attacked, beaten, robbed and left half dead. It is the experience that happens when situations, people, sometimes even those we have

trusted, take everything from us and leave us in the middle of the road.

However, life is made up of encounters, and in these encounters, we emerge for what we are. We find ourselves in front of others, faced with their fragility and weakness, and we can decide what to do: to take care of them or pretend nothing is wrong. A priest and a Levite go down that same road. They are people who serve in the Temple of Jerusalem, who live in the sacred space. And yet, the practice of worship does not automatically lead to being compassionate. Indeed, before being a religious matter, compassion is a question of humanity! Before being believers, we are called to be human.

We can imagine that, after staying a long time in Jerusalem, that priest and that Levite are in a hurry to return home. It is indeed haste, so present in our lives, that very often

prevents us from feeling compassion. Those who think that their own journey must take precedence are not willing to stop for another.

But here comes someone who is actually able to stop: he is a Samaritan, hence a person belonging to a despised people (cf. *2 Kings* 17). In his case, the text does not specify the direction, but only says that he was travelling. Religiosity does not enter into this. This Samaritan simply stops because he is a man faced with another man in need of help.

Compassion is expressed through practical gestures. The Evangelist Luke ponders the actions of the Samaritan, whom we call “good,” but in the text he is simply a person: a Samaritan approaches, because if you want to help someone, you cannot think of keeping your distance, you have to get involved,

get dirty, perhaps be contaminated; he binds the wounds after cleaning them with oil and wine; he loads him onto his horse, taking on the burden, because one who truly helps if one is willing to feel the weight of the other's pain; he takes him to an inn where he spends money, "two silver coins," more or less two days of work; and he undertakes to return and eventually pay more, because the other is not a package to deliver, but someone to care for.

Dear brothers and sisters, when will we too be capable of interrupting our journey and having compassion? When we understand that the wounded man in the street represents each one of us. And then the memory of all the times that Jesus stopped to take care of us will make us more capable of compassion.

Let us pray, then, that we can grow in humanity, so that our relationships may be truer and richer in compassion. Let us ask the Heart of Jesus for the grace increasingly to have the same feelings as him.

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