

October 11th: St. John XXIII, pope

Gospel text (Lk 10,25-37): A teacher of the Law came and began putting Jesus to the test. And he said, «Master, what shall I do to receive eternal life?». Jesus replied, «What is written in the Scripture? How do you understand it?». The man answered, «It is written: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself’». Jesus replied, «What a good answer! Do this and you shall live».

The man wanted to keep up appearances, so he replied, «Who is my neighbor?». Jesus then said, «There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. It happened that a priest was going along that road and saw the man, but passed by on the other side. Like-wise a Levite saw the man and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, too, was going that way, and when he came upon the man, he was moved with compassion. He went over to him and treated his wounds with oil and wine and wrapped them with bandages. Then he put him on his own mount and brought him to an inn where he took care of him. The next day he had to set off, but he gave two silver coins to the innkeeper and told him: ‘Take care of him and whatever you spend on him, I will repay when I come back’».

Jesus then asked, «Which of these three, do you think, made himself neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?». The teacher of the Law answered, «The one who had mercy on him». And Jesus said, «Go then and do the same».

«Who is my neighbor?»

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Today we celebrate the Feast of Saint John XXIII, who belonged to the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) since he was 14. His life was a long journey starting from the simplicity of his peasant family: seminary student, priest, episcopal secretary, spiritual director and professor of church history in the seminary, diplomat, cardinal, Nuncio of Pope Pius XII in France, Pope and initiator of the Second Vatican Council

Along this path, he was mainly a shepherd according to the heart of God, who smells of sheep, following the words said by Pope Francis. He was of those who do not "pass by on the other side" (cf. Lk 10:31-32), as today's Gospel says, when seeing the man beaten by the robbers, abandoned on the edge of the road and placed at the roadside of humanity. John XXIII is a shepherd of those who put himself at the service of those who live in the peripheries, according to another felicitous phrase from the Pope.

Today Jesus makes a hard criticism to the Church people -priest, levite- who not divert from their path to meet the unfortunates because they are convinced of already fulfilling their service at the temple, which is already enough for them, and there is no need to worry about the others.

On the other hand, Jesus considers in the parable of the Good Samaritan who the "neighbor" of his brother really is. Indeed, when approaching someone that is away, who is different, we become "neighbors". Jesus praises those who know how to approach and get close to the others. The person of Saint John XXIII is an excellent model for us. He saw these forgotten brothers not like outcasts, but simply as brothers. He always said: "Let us approach each other, know each other, love each other, and then we will answer the prayer of Jesus: let us all be one".

As we meditate on the Gospel of this feast, surely Jesus is also telling us: «Go and do likewise» (Lk 10:37).