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Accompanying and Leading to Christ

a. “A Samaritan while traveling came near him”

“Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, «Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.» Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’

“He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

— Luke 10:30-37

It is impossible not to be moved by this image of a dying man lying by the side of the road, ignored by the priest and the Levite who were passing by and who went on their way, leaving him to his fate.

In this famous parable known as “the Good Samaritan”, Jesus redefines the idea of “neighbour” for his disciples. He tells them that it is no longer merely a question of those closest to them, someone to whose aid you would naturally come, but encompasses every person who needs assistance, even if one runs into them by chance. You are his or her neighbour simply by virtue of your being there, of having passed by and of being in a position to do something.

What did the Samaritan do in the parable? First of all, “*moved with pity*”, he treated the wounded man with the remedies of his time: wine, to clean and disinfect, and oil, as a balm and ointment. A spiritual reading of this passage, however, has long found that the sacraments of Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist are evoked by the oil and wine: care for a sick person is not limited to care for the body.

“Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.”

— James 5:14-15

The Samaritan brought the wounded man to an inn and entrusted him to the innkeeper until his return. Several times Jesus includes just such a character in his parables¹, someone who, before setting out on a journey, provides instructions on what to do in his absence while awaiting his return. Christian reflection has of course identified this character with the Lord himself, and from the beginning the community of Christ’s disciples – the Church – has recognized itself in that inn where the wounded man is cared for body and soul, even at greater cost than anticipated, until the Lord should return.



¹ See, for instance, *Matthew* 24:45-51 and 25:14-30; *Luke* 12:42-46 and 19:11-27.



“Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

“When he saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you.’ Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, ‘Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

“When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, « Your sins are forgiven you, » or to say, « Stand up and walk »? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ — he said to the one who was paralyzed — ‘I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.’

“Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.”

— Luke 5:18-26

b. “Who can forgive sins?”

We don’t know who these people were who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus: were they friends or relatives of this disabled person, people whom we would today call informal caregivers (“aidants naturels”)? Or were they charitable souls who were touched by his misfortune? It doesn’t really matter for us. What matters is to acknowledge their exceptional devotion and the efforts they were willing to make for this sick man. It is no small matter to pass through a crowd, climb up on a roof, make an opening, and lower someone on a stretcher – all for the sake of bringing the sick person to the Lord.

What is most striking – it is the central point of the narrative – is that Jesus begins by healing the soul, not the body: before curing the paralytic, Jesus forgave his sins, to the great scandal of the scribes and Pharisees who understood very well that Jesus was doing something only God could do. This scandal ought to affect us as well when we think about the care to be given to persons at the end of life. Inspired by the bold stretcher-bearers who fought through a crowd and climbed up on a roof, what major efforts should we not invest in order to permit the seriously ill to meet the Lord in the sacraments and to have access to the forgiveness of sins, the Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist?

Along with the sacraments that are evoked by the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus' insistence on the primacy of spiritual healing underscores an aspect of compassion that is sometimes overlooked, an aspect nevertheless that the Gospel puts first.

c. **“They compelled a passer-by... to carry his cross.”**



“Then they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.”

– Mark 15:20-21

Like the Good Samaritan, Simon of Cyrene is a “passer-by” whose life is shaken up by a sudden and unexpected encounter with the suffering of another. Unlike the Good Samaritan, however, Simon does not make the first move but is pressed into service by the Roman soldiers tasked with crucifying Jesus.

It was thus against his will that Simon found himself entering into the suffering of Jesus and literally carrying his cross. Indeed, he must have had many other things to do on that eve of the great feast of Passover as he returned to Jerusalem where his sons Alexander and Rufus must have awaited him. Instead he is abruptly summoned, disturbed, perhaps even roughed up, and doubtless horrified by Jesus' condition and by what is awaiting him...

When a sickness or disability enters the life of a loved one, when decline and old age makes him or her progressively weaker, when death is imminent, how many people – whether caregivers or mere passers-by – become caught up in the suffering of another and can see themselves in Simon of Cyrene? They are not mere powerless onlookers before another's suffering, but they share in it and live it. God's Word helps us to see that when we accompany someone in his or her anguish, it is truly the cross of Jesus that we are carrying.

To receive and meditate on the Word of God:

a. “A Samaritan while traveling came near him”



In this parable, Jesus presents several characters: an attacked and wounded traveller, thieves, a priest, a Levite, a Samaritan, and an innkeeper. What faces do they have concretely in my life? Which of the characters speaks to me most? What is evoked for me by the oil and wine used by the Samaritan?

b. “Who can forgive sins?”



I put myself in the place of the paralytic on the stretcher and try to imagine what was going on in his heart and soul as he was being carried, as he was lowered through the roof, as Jesus looked at him and forgave his sins, as Jesus told him to get up and carry his bed...Would I have been surprised by the first words of Jesus? What connection does Jesus make between healing and the forgiveness of sins?

c. “They compelled a passer-by... to carry his cross.”



The Gospel writers don't tell us anything of what happened between Jesus and Simon of Cyrene. Did they look at each other? Did they speak? What must Simon have thought about while he was carrying Jesus' cross? How did he relate this eventful homeward journey to his sons, Alexander and Rufus, who were waiting for him? What is the Lord saying to me today in the account of this meeting?



To continue reflecting or to stimulate discussion:

- What touches me most about this step in the journey of reflection, entitled *Accompanying and Leading to Christ*? Which passage from God's Word speaks to me most?
 - Which of these three narratives describes best our vocation as disciples of Christ in the context of end-of-life care in Québec today?
 - How are we called to be Good Samaritans, stretcher-bearers, or Simons of Cyrene?
 - As Christians, to whom are we caregivers?
 - What importance do we give to the sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, and Eucharist when we think about the care offered to persons at the end of life? How does this summon us and speak to us, personally and as members of a Christian community?
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*The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.*

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.*

— Psalm 23



Assembly of Québec Catholics Bishops

Accompanying and Leading to Christ

Step two of

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a journey of reflection in five steps***

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