

*(The following statement was adapted from the homily Bishop Soto gave Sunday, July 10 at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament)*

The story of the Good Samaritan from last Sunday is a well-known Christian parable (Lk 10:25-37). Few people, Christian or non-Christians, would not be familiar with Jesus' story about the man who fell victim to robbers and then was later saved and soothed by a Samaritan on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem. The term "Good Samaritan" has crept into popular language and even law. Hospitals and other charitable organization have taken as a name, "the Good Samaritan."

The horrifying, heart-wrenching events of this past week along with similar attacks in recent months give today's proclamation of the familiar parable a sober and somber tone. The violence at the beginning of the gospel story is disturbingly too familiar to the waves of stories that have shaken us. While happening so regularly we stubbornly resist calling it normal. Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston, San Bernardino, Orlando, Baton Rouge, Minnesota, and now Dallas -- this litany of violence threatens us. The parable is too close to what our nation now suffers, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead." Recognizing the echo of that parable in

the bloody tragedies on our streets, the question of Jesus to the scribe stabs our heart, "Who was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"

For us today, that question is not a hypothetical case referring to fictional biblical characters: a priest, a Levite, or a Samaritan. We are now part of the contemporary telling of that parable and its resolution will depend on our response to the question that Jesus now makes to us, "Who will be a neighbor?"

The churning cycle of news reports strip away the soft veneer to this familiar parable. We can now appreciate the boldness of the Samaritan's gesture. To do what he did, meant overcoming deep ethnic hatreds, engrained cultural norms, and the fears of violence that still may have lurked just down the road. What compelled him to stop, lean down and touch the half-dead stranger? The scribe to whom Jesus addressed the parable responded. The Samaritan was the one who showed mercy. Mercy, God's mercy, is the force that became grace in that moment of violent hostility on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem.

In the second reading on Sunday (Col 1:15-20), Paul told the Colossians that Christ would reconcile all things, "making peace by the blood of his cross." By his mercy, Jesus has already reconciled us. He has already healed us. He has already broken

down the barriers that separate us. Who will be the instruments of this mercy for others? Who will believe that we are already neighbors and then act on this belief as did the Good Samaritan in the parable.

The familiarity of this parable can blind us to the boldness of its message. The sad litany of social violence reminds us how still urgent such boldness is today.

Today's parable awakens us to the still unfinished work of reconciliation and healing. The work was begun on the cross. It continues in the lives of those who work to bring all things and all people together in God's mercy.