

**THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK**

And the scholar of the law asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds by asking "Who was neighbor to the man in need? Then go and do likewise. "

There are certain questions in life that I call "Catholic" questions. For example, only a Catholic, when attending a wedding Mass at 3PM on a given Saturday will ask this question: "Does this count?" Now if you are a Catholic that question makes perfect sense and no one needs to explain it to you. If you are a member of a different Christian tradition the question does not compute. The "counting" part is whether or not the wedding Mass will satisfy the responsibility to attend Mass on the Lord's Day and thus fulfill our Catholic responsibility to the Ten Commandments. Only Catholics ask this question.

No Lutheran has ever asked such a question, nor any Episcopalian or Methodist. But the question that the scholar asks of Jesus today is a question that is asked by all his followers whether Catholics or other Christians. "Who is my neighbor?" The reason the question is asked is so that we can get a clear sense of the extent and the limitations of our moral responsibilities in this life. If the person is my neighbor then I have certain obligations towards that person. If the person is not my neighbor then I do not have the same set of responsibilities toward that person. Or at least so the thinking goes.

What Jesus does is to turn the question around and place the quality of neighborliness not in the status of the neighbor but in my personal attitude to each and every person I encounter. It is not a question of how close they are to me or how much I know them or what common plight we share with each other linking us as neighbors. Jesus asks us to adopt an attitude of neighborliness towards each person we meet. If we do this then we never have to ask that question again. "Who was neighbor to the man in need?" "The one who treated him with mercy." "Yes. That's it precisely. Because he has an attitude of mercy in his heart each person he meets will experience in some way that attitude. And that is precisely how Jesus interacts with us. That is why he wants us to be neighbor to the one in need.