9th Grade Class Mass

I asked my 9th-grade advisees what they thought 9th graders would want to hear about today's Gospel. They asked me to offer some advice or insights that address three of their concerns. Since this might be my only chance to give them some advice, I will take advantage of this moment. First, they asked me to talk about how to care for all of God's people.

That led me to ask myself how many of God's people are in the world. I googled and learned that there are 7.5 billion people in the world. That is a lot of people to care for. Where do we begin? St. Thomas Aquinas said we should love those closest to us and extend our love outward. So, you start with your family, parents, brothers, and sisters. Then you further extend your love and care for your classmates and teachers. Then you extend your love even further by caring for the members of your church or parish community. Then you expand your love and care for those with whom you work or who are on your team. Then you extend your love even further by caring for those who cry for help in other parts of the world by raising food or collecting money, donating clothing, and building houses through Habitat for Humanity.

Did you notice something? Everyone whom you care for is right there in front of you. And that includes those you help who may live in other parts of the world. How are they right in front of you? When Campus Ministry appeals for help on behalf of people who live in other parts of the world, their needs are suddenly right in front of us.

The poor traveler who needed help was right in front of the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. He was right there. Only one offered to help. Look around and see who is right there in front of you who needs help. Follow the example of the Samaritan.

By the way, we can't do everything ourselves. In our second reading, St. Paul reminds us that the Church is the body of Christ. Some of us will do great work that not all of us have the time, skills, or passion for doing. We may not have the time or the skills to do what others do. We do what we can do. All of us can support others who are doing great work we cannot do with our donations or collecting food, clothing, words of encouragement, and prayers. If everybody in the world cared for others in the ways I described, we would not have the great levels of homelessness and hunger as we do now.

The second point my advisees wanted me to talk about is how doing good leads to good outcomes. They saw that the Good Samaritan did a good deed for the poor traveler who was left to die. The good result of that good deed was saving the traveler's life. We don't know what happened to the traveler once he got well. Maybe he was a father or a husband who returned to his wife and family, who depended on him for their livelihood. Perhaps he remembered the care of the Good Samaritan and decided he would help someone like himself who had fallen on hard times. Yes, doing good often leads to good outcomes but not always.

Look at the life of Jesus. Look at all the good that he did, yet he ended up on the cross. 9th graders, we live in a fallen world. Yes, we are made in God's image, as the Book of Genesis describes beautifully. Because of the mystery of sin, we don't do a very good job of living like we are made in God's image. Why is that? Our minds are clouded; our wills are weak, and our passions are disordered. St. Paul put it this way, "The good I want to do, I don't. The evil I don't want to do, I do." (Rom. 7:19)

If we do our best to live like God, who is love, it may not always lead to good outcomes. If we do what is right, what is good, and what is loving, we may be laughed at, lose friends, and even suffer physically or emotionally. How do we know that we are living in God's image? It is when we love or care about our enemies. Now, by love, I am not talking about an emotion. By love, I am talking about a decision to want

what is best and good and right for someone who doesn't like us and may even reject our outreach to them.

Finally, my advisees wanted to know how they could be better Samaritans. Let me say this. When Jesus walked this earth, the Jewish people looked down upon the Samaritans. They were perceived to be inferior, crude, and incapable of doing very much of any worth. So, when Jesus told this parable about a Samaritan whom he made the hero of this story, his Jewish audience was not just surprised. They were shocked. They never expected that.

So, 9th graders, be like the Samaritan in today's Gospel whom Jesus made into a hero, leaving his listeners in shock. Great. Leave people in shock by surprising them with your unexpected acts of generosity, kindness, helpfulness, and compassion. Begin with those closest to you: your parents, your brothers or sisters, your classmates, your teacher, your coach, or someone you don't even like. Then, enjoy the shock on their faces as they come to terms with how considerate you were to them when they least expected it or even deserved it. That, too, is what it means to be like Christ. Think about all the people Jesus shocked by the mercy and kindness he extended to them.

And don't stop there. Shock yourselves by being generous to those who live in other parts of this city, country, or world. They are right in front of you through Campus Ministry, which appeals on their behalf when they ask you to bring food, clothing, or money to school. Don't bring the bare minimum. Be generous. Give more than what is expected. You will never know who will benefit from your kindness. You will never see them. You will never hear from them a thank you, at least not in this life. We human beings would be shocked to realize how God rarely hears a word of acknowledgment or gratitude in return for his generosity to us. That is why we worship God on Sundays. At least one day of the week is set aside to ensure we don't forget to praise and thank God.

Finally, I want to thank the 9th graders who acted out our Gospel for today. It was intended to be a bit humorous, and I saw that it brought some smiles to your faces. I am reminded that we don't always have to be so serious when doing good for others.

So, don't forget to smile. Do it in a joyful, kind, considerate, and gracious spirit. Be of good cheer. In his letter to Second Corinthians, St. Paul makes the same point: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or because you have to, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:17) God loves a cheerful giver because God is a cheerful giver. "For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that**?" (**Matt 5:44-45 NLT) As the sun's nature is to shine, God's nature is to love.

So, be like the good Samaritan and be of good cheer when you do.