



**United Independent Catholic Church
Office of the Presiding Bishop**

Quis est meus proximus?

Who is my neighbor? Is it the people who literally live next door? Yes you could say that. Is it my family and friends? Of course you could say that, but that is not the complete picture when you look at the Gospels. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was quite explicit when he talked about “Neighbor”. We all know the story of the Good Samaritan, but we need to read the passages before that story.

* There was a scholar of the law* who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”^x 26 Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” 27 He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”^y 28 He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”^z

29 But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And **who is my neighbor?**” 30 Jesus replied, “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. 31* A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. 32 Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. 33 But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. 34 He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ 36 Which of these three, in your opinion, was **neighbor** to the robbers’ victim?” 37 He answered, “The one who treated him with **compassion**.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

As we read the story we need to understand that according to Jewish Law no one could come into contact with a corpse or they would be considered ritually unclean. Also, anyone who was unclean could not enter into worship. The priest and the Levite

were following the law to the letter. They were following the law for the law sake. Jesus' response was two-fold; he was commenting on the letter of the law which does not give anything worthwhile to anyone. He was also commenting on the **value** of the person who was vulnerable. The scholar understood the law, but not its implications when it came to knowing what neighbor meant. Simply put, Jesus commanded us to care for the vulnerable.

Then the question, unfortunately, needs to be asked: Who are the vulnerable? Here is the list for those of you who have no clue what that means.

- The Poor
- The Homeless
- Children
- The sick
- The elderly
- Illegal Aliens
- Mental Ill
- Those who have intellectual/developmental disabilities
- Those who have physical disabilities.
- Veterans

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it presents a closer look at who the vulnerable are.

Unfortunately the vulnerable in the United States are throwaways especially when you hear of Congress attempting to eliminate health care for those who cannot afford it, cutting food stamps for those who are the working poor, cutting school lunches for children, eliminating Medicare for the elderly, reducing Social Security, and the list goes on.

The question that I beg is what is the response that Jesus calls us to? Folks, going to church is not enough. We are Christians after church. If we believe in what Jesus taught us in the Gospels, we are to advocate for those who are vulnerable. We are called to own the fact that the vulnerable have intrinsic value, regardless of their ability to contribute to our country.

I hear a lot about churches who preach the Gospel of Abundance. I hear of churches who preach hateful things about gay people. I hear about churches who line themselves up with politicians, who are far from exemplary. And I do not hear from

any mainline churches that put out any public statements regarding protecting the vulnerable. We have missed the boat.

What concerns me are the worthless platitudes that I see and hear about Jesus, or God if you will. These platitudes mean absolutely nothing unless we back them up with action. Christianity is a faith that calls for action. Not being comfortable. Being a Christian comes with a price and that price is practicing what we easily preach.

Do we donate time to serving food to the elderly who are shut in? Do we donate time to working in a food kitchen? Do we let our voices be heard when the vulnerable are ignored by our government? Do we donate food to food pantries throughout this country? Do we dare question everything and embrace the willingness to learn? Do we confront our politicians when injustice is being embraced by them?

Today is now the time to step up to our responsibilities as Christians. When we stand before the judgement thrown of God we will be asked. DID YOU LOVE? Our pat answer is of course we did. We loved our family. Most everyone loves their family. That is way too easy. We loved our friends. Again that really does not count. If you answered that you loved your neighbor, God will then ask: How?

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Sincerely,

Bishop Jerry
Servant