“A Heart Which Sees”: On Being Neighbor

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“The Christian programme—the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is ‘a heart which sees’. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”

(Benedict XVI, “Deus Caritas Est”)
Le Chambon

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[Image of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon]

[Image of book cover: Weapons of the Spirit]

[Image of a group photo]
"It's just who we are."
"A Heart Which Sees": On Being Neighbor

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Benedict XVI, “Deus Caritas Est”

“Following the example given in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. … [T]hese charity workers need a ‘formation of the heart’: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed … from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6). …

“The Christian programme—the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is ‘a heart which sees’. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”

(Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 31 a, b) [emphasis added]
John Paul II, “Salvifici Doloris”

“Therefore one must cultivate this sensitivity of heart….”

“Here we come to the enormous importance of having the right attitudes …. The eloquence of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and of the whole Gospel, is especially this: every individual must feel as if called personally to bear witness to love in suffering. The institutions are very important and indispensable; nevertheless, no institution can by itself replace the human heart … when it is a question of dealing with the sufferings of another.”

(John Paul II, Salvifici Doloris, 28, 29) [emphasis added]
“Go and Do Likewise”

• This exhortation of Jesus has a twofold sense:
  – ACT like the Good Samaritan—do as he did.
  – BE like the Good Samaritan—be the kind of person (institution) who can BE neighbor to the person in need.

• What was it about the Good Samaritan, about the people of Le Chambon, about the Good Samaritans in Boston that enabled them to do what they did?

• Not all were “Good Samaritans”—the priest; the Levite—why?
Perception and Blindness in the Parable: Spohn

- Parable is about perception and blindness.

- What enables the Samaritan to SEE and respond? *Compassion—heart “sees” because filled with compassion*

- Parable of Good Samaritan: “shows that compassion is the optic nerve of Christian vision” (87).

- Keenan: “The parable of the Good Samaritan portrays neighbor love definitively as the practice of mercy (or compassion). … The parable … serves as the foundational explanation of the love commandment” (124).
• **Compassion led to empathy**
  – Feeling with and feeling into the situation (90).
  – Identifying with and entering into the experience of others, the “problem” or “chaos” of the situation.

• **Empathy leads to effective action**
  – Responds appropriately to immediate need, and
  – Looks ahead to continuing need.

• **Compassion without boundaries**
  – Good Samaritan doesn’t question whether traveler is a “neighbor.”
  – Rather, to whom can I show love? Jesus stretches limits of vision & mercy.
Need for Conversion

• Parable of the Good Samaritan calls us to deep reflection about our own moral perception—as individuals and organizations.
  – Do we have “a heart which sees”? Where are our moral blind spots? Do we suffer from moral blindness?
  – Are there certain types of people and certain types of situations or problems that we choose not to see?

• Parable actually calls for more than self-reflection—calls for conversion.
  – “Conversion requires confronting our blindness and reluctance to be engaged with people who are threatening or repulsive” (98).
  – Correcting (selective) moral blindness requires rectifying the heart’s dispositions.

“A heart which sees” requires compassion, empathy, a readiness to respond effectively, compassion without boundaries, and an openness to conversion.
Sensitivity of Heart: John Paul II

• “The name “Good Samaritan” fits every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others. … Therefore, one must cultivate this sensitivity of heart which bears witness to compassion towards a suffering person” (28).

• Sensitivity of heart/compassion makes possible:
  – “Stopping” (in contrast to passing by on the other side, indifferently).
  – Stopping not out of curiosity, but availability—an opening of oneself to the other and giving of one’s self—“A Good Samaritan is the person capable of … a gift of self” (28)—opening this “I” to the other person.
  – Availability to the other in order to bring help—“[A] Good Samaritan is one who brings help in suffering, whatever its nature may be … help which is effective” (28).
We Might Also Add …

- **Courage**
  - Samaritan put his life at risk.
  - Also risked further social and religious ostracization.
  - Many risks involved in being neighbor—requires courage.

- **Hospitality**
  - Samaritan is prime example of extending hospitality.
  - Offers assistance in a welcoming, respectful, non-judgmental manner.
  - Gives of his own resources—oil, wine, money—providing for the needs of the other.
  - Attitude of hospitality is essential to “a heart which sees”.
In Sum

• What does the parable of the Good Samaritan teach us about what is required to BE a neighbor—to have “a heart which sees”.
  – **Compassion**—being sensitive to the suffering of others; stopping, receptivity.
  – **Empathy**—a solidarity with the other and entering into the other’s misfortune.
  – **Availability/giving of self**—moving toward effective action that helps.
  – **Compassion without boundaries**
  – **Courage**
  – **Hospitality**
  – **Conversion**

• But are these dispositions, these virtues, sufficient?

• A different version of the parable of the Good Samaritan.
“A Heart Which Sees”: On Being Neighbor

The Overwhelmed Samaritan
“A Heart Which Sees”—within Limits: Verhey

- “The Good Samaritan no longer seems quite so apt an image for the care of those who hurt, and the reason is simple: The Samaritan did not face the issue health care is forced to face today, the issue of scarcity. The limitless compassion of the Samaritan makes his story seem more odd than exemplary: unlimited care seems not a real option” (361).

- “Can we continue to tell this story of the Good Samaritan as an image of care for those who hurt—and acknowledge the limits of our resources? … Can we still be Good Samaritans … in the midst of tragic choices imposed by scarcity?”
Virtues to Cope with Compassion within Limits

• Given the fact of limits, what other dispositions/virtues/attitudes need to be part of the character of Good Samaritans?

• To be “good” the contemporary Samaritan requires virtues besides compassion.

• Verhey’s suggestions …
  – *Attitude that acknowledges scarcity/limits*
  – *Attitude that acknowledges tragedy*
  – *Truthfulness*
  – *Humility*
  – *Gratitude*
Compassion, Limits and Justice

- **Justice** — “The Samaritan will never be good *without* compassion, but let it be said again: the contemporary Samaritan will never be good with *just* compassion. … The contemporary Samaritan cannot be good with only compassion, but *just* compassion is indeed required. The virtue of justice is essential to those who would be good in the midst of scarcity” (369).

- **Concern for public policy** that does justice; “The very compassion that moved the Samaritan to care for *one* who hurt would motivate attention to policy when *many* hurt” (370).

- Lifting a **prophetic voice** against injustice—social policy ought to be measured against the standard of “Good News to the poor.”
Solidarity with the Vulnerable

- **Avoidance of the conceit of philanthropy**
  - An attitude that we are the worthy benefactors and they are the needy beneficiaries.
  - Rather, “The Samaritan gives no hint of the conceit of philanthropy. He shares the suffering. He sees the wounded man not only as the needy beneficiary, but as a neighbor, a member of a community that includes the sick. … The story … is the story of living in a community that shares the human vulnerability to suffering and communally supports care for the members of the community” (376).
In Sum

• So while we are called to do likewise—to be neighbor—to possess “a heart which sees”, that always occurs in a context.
  – Of human finitude
  – Of limited resources

• Unable to do all that we can do and that love wants to do because of limits.

• In addition to developing character traits/virtues that enable us—as individuals and organizations—to be neighbor, we also need to develop those virtues that enable us to be neighbor in the midst of limits and tragic choices.
The Good Samaritan and Catholic Health Care

- “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37)
  - Be like the Good Samaritan
  - Be a neighbor

- Followers of Jesus have taken the injunction seriously
  - Henry Sigerist: The Christian faith introduced “the most revolutionary and decisive change in the attitude of society toward the sick. Christianity came into the world as the religion of healing, as the joyful Gospel of the redeemer and of redemption. It addressed itself to the disinherited, to the sick and the afflicted, and promised them healing, a restoration both spiritual and physical….It became the duty of the Christian to attend to the sick and poor of the community….The social position of the sick man thus became fundamentally different from what it had been before. He assumed a preferential position which has been his ever since.”

(Civilization and Disease, 1943, pp. 69-70)
The Good Samaritan and Catholic Health Care

– Verhey: “In memory of Jesus, the Christian community turned toward the sick, not against them, caring for them in their suffering and attending to them in their dying, practicing hospitality to them rather than ostracizing them from community. Down through the centuries, the memory of Jesus echoed in the care of the sick—and especially in the care of the sick poor” (381).
In Memory of Jesus

- The memory of Jesus …
  - Whose very mission was to be God’s compassionate and healing presence in the world—to announce and initiate God’s reign of love, mercy and justice.
  - Who defines his very ministry in terms of compassion and healing (Lk 4:18).
  - Who is depicted in the Gospels, in instance after instance, welcoming the sick with benevolence and compassion, relieving their suffering and healing them (Mt 4:23; Mt 10:8; 11: 2-5).
  - Who is the supreme Good Samaritan.
  - Who handed over this work to his followers.
  - Who made it clear that compassionate care for others is an actual encounter with Himself (Mt 25: 36, 40).
Our Heritage—What Is Entrusted to US

• It is this to which we are heirs …
  – The example and injunction of Jesus.
  – Centuries of his followers carrying on his compassionate healing and BEING a neighbor.

• It is this with which we are entrusted …
  – Surely in the “business” of health care.
  – But what we are about is far more.

• Effects of the demands of the business of health care.
The Insidious Threat to Mission

• “What remains constant across the board is a sense of what would constitute failure: not that some of these institutions might cease to exist or even consciously and deliberately cease to be Catholic…but that they would mindlessly drift into essentially secular simulacra of their religious selves, still bearing the insignia but no longer sharing the allegiance, their Catholic identity hollowed out…."

Peter Steinfels

A People Adrift

The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America (2003)
Pope Francis

• “We can build many things, but if we do not confess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable N.G.O., but not the church.”

• “Francis of Assisi—for me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation…. How I would like a church which is poor and for the poor!”
The Heart of Catholic Health Care—Grounding Story

- Cardinal Bernardin: “I am unequivocally committed to the belief that the provision of faith-inspired health care is one of the Church’s ministries and is essential to the Church’s life and mission. While the manner in which this ministry is exercised has changed, and will change even more, the ministry itself must continue.” (Bernardin, Speech to Catholic Health Care of Illinois, August 31, 1994)
- We are a “ministry” as well as a business and before being a business.
- At the heart of that ministry is “being neighbor.”
- Return to grounding stories in times of rapid and dramatic change.
  - Remind us of who we are called to be.
  - Inspire us to recommit ourselves.
  - Motivate us to bridge the gap and address moral blind spots—conversion.
The Challenge of the Parable

- And so, we return to the story of the Good Samaritan …

  - Reminded that we must show compassion to those in need, regardless of who they are, and exercise effective action.
  - But we miss something extraordinarily important if our focus is solely on **doing**.
  - Parable also calls us to **BE** the kind of person who is neighbor—to develop “a heart which sees” and to develop those traits, those dispositions, those virtues which enable us to be like the Good Samaritan and to “Go and do likewise.”
  - **This is not optional!** …for disciples…or for those who carry on Jesus’ healing mission.
  - **Core to the identity** of Catholic health care and those who are part of Catholic health care.
Need for Formation and Conversion

• “BEING neighbor” is difficult and a challenge because of our individual and organizational moral blind spots;
  – Because our hearts do not see or do not always see clearly.
  – Because our “sensitivity of heart” is not as unencumbered or expansive as it should be.

• “Being neighbor” requires attention and effort and practice…at the individual and organizational levels.
  – Invites us to look at ourselves and our experience, individually and collectively, and identify where our “seeing” is inadequate and why.
  – Requires on-going growth and conversion; work of mission.

• This is ultimately about IDENTITY and INTEGRITY.

• Like the townspeople of Le Chambon, we must be able to say with regard to being neighbor … in as honest, and direct, and simple a way …
It’s just who we are!
Questions

• Who are the persons in need of urgent care today? What are the ways in which we, individually and collectively, are blind to or avoid the obvious need of some persons?

• What are the challenges to compassionate care in our time and in our situation?

• What price are we willing to pay as individuals and organizations to ensure just and compassionate care?

• How vigilant are we in assessing the justice implications of health system changes?

• How do we balance response to the needs of individuals with responsible stewardship of shared resources and promotion of the common good?  (From: Health Ethics Guide, 2012)
Sources