

Spiritually Speaking

Am I a good neighbor to others?

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph

In this Sunday's Gospel, we hear Christ's parable about a man lying wounded by the roadside and how two people passed him by but a third stopped and helped him. Let us call to mind the number of times we have passed by someone who needed a little help.



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

One day, Mother Teresa was walking down the streets of London and saw a man looking sad and sitting quite folded up. As she went up to him, took his hand, and asked, "How are you?" "He took hold of my hand and held it tight, his face lit with joy.... such small acts of thoughtfulness and love can bring so much joy, peace and happiness." On another occasion, Mother Teresa said, "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody. The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity, terrible indifference towards one's neighbor who lives at the roadside assaulted by exploitation, corruption, poverty and disease."

Luke 10: 25-37 begins with a scribe asking Jesus, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus directs the scribe's attention to the Sacred Scriptures. The answer is "love God and express it by loving your neighbor." However, to the scribe the word "neighbor" meant another Scribe or Pharisee - never a Samaritan or a Gentile. Hence, the scribe insists on further clarification of the word. So, Jesus tells him the parable of the Good Samaritan, which indicates that a "neighbor" is anyone who needs help and anyone who gives that help. Thus, do not to ask, "Who is my neighbor?" but rather ask, "Am I a good neighbor to others?"

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus presents three philosophies:

The philosophy of the thieves who robbed: "What is yours is mine; I will take it by hook or crook." In Jesus's day, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a safe haven for bandit groups who roamed the countryside like packs of wild dogs, attacking innocent victims. No wonder the Jewish traveler was robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the road.

The philosophy of the Jewish priest and the Levite: "What is mine is mine; I won't part with it." The priests were powerful upper-class authorities governing the Temple cult. The Levites were the priests' associates, who provided music, incense, sacred bread, Temple curtains and adornments. The representatives of these classes did not pay any attention to the wounded man because of their utter selfishness. Their excuses: a) "If the man is dead and we touch him we will be unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:11) and disqualified for temple service." Thus, they saw the wounded man not as a person needing help, but a possible source of ritual impurity. b) "This may be a trap set for us by bandits." This excuse has some validity, as bandits did use a "wounded" member as a bait to trap other people.

The philosophy of the Samaritan: "What is mine is yours as well. I shall share it with you." The Samaritan was generous enough to see the wounded Jew as a neighbor. He ignored the long history of enmity between his people and the Jews. He was taking a real risk, since the robbers might still be nearby. Nevertheless, he gave first aid to the wounded Jew, took him to a nearby inn and paid for his food and accommodations with enough denarii to pay for more than three weeks' board and lodging. The Samaritan also assured the innkeeper of further payment for any additional medical requirements of the wounded man.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho passes right through our home, parish and workplace. It is any place where people are being robbed of their material goods or their dignity, any place where there is suffering and oppression. The Jericho Road may even be our own homes, where our spouse, children or parents lying "wounded" by bitter words or more blatant forms of verbal, emotional or physical abuse. God wants more than anything for us to show our love to others. Jesus invites us to have hearts of mercy for those who are being hurt or mistreated on any of the "Jericho Roads" of life.

An invitation to be loving and merciful to our enemies. The Jews and the Samaritans during the time of Jesus hated each other. When Jesus told the story of a Samaritan helping a Jew, everyone was probably shocked. Impossible. "Good Samaritan" would have sounded like a bad joke. The parable is an invitation for people of all times to love their enemies--to love those they have previously hated.

Lindsey and Doherty threaten sophistry of Port

To the editor;
Take a deep breath Morrow County and allow the rest of the story to come to the surface regarding the termination of Morrow County Administrator Darrell Green, before initiating a recall that would tear the heart and soul of our county. Melissa Lindsey and Jim Doherty have tirelessly and faithfully served Morrow County and in this case they protected our citizens from a lawsuit by not speaking, something Don Russell deliberately failed to do. Russell had no business attempting to listen to personal accounts of the investigation that he full well knew must be kept private. Russell got the same information as the other commissioners, and he knows exactly why Darrell Green was terminated and whether Green was blindsided as he claims. Green knew that Lindsey and Doherty could not respond publicly to his yet to be proved claim of being blindsided. By Russell's crafty public criticism of fellow commissioners, he has purposely created great confusion and anger in our community.

We have a larger, life-threatening issue in our county than a divisive recall attempt. Our water in private wells in the Irrigon and Boardman area and beyond has been intentionally poisoned with cancer causing and health destabilizing nitrates. The wells in our neighborhood (between Boardman and Irrigon) are polluted with five to ten times the safe level of nitrates. The Port of Morrow has been pouring nitrogen polluted wastewater on thousands of acres of farm and "twenty percent of dairy land for decades." (Oregon Capital Chronicle, June 17, 22). "The Port of Morrow... for years has spread excessive amounts of nitrate-laced wastewater on area farmlands in a way that contaminates ground water and was 'reckless' in doing so." (Oregon Capital Chronicle (OCC), Jan. 11, 22). The DEQ found the Port was 'reckless' "because the public agency intentionally applied excessive amount of nitrogen." (Op. Cit. OCC Jan.11,22) Not only was the Port of Morrow 'reckless' in poisoning our well water, but they were also "negligent in failure to monitor the nitrogen" (Op. Cit. OCC Jan. 11,

22). If any person or public agency deliberate poisoned your drinking water, they would be held accountable in a court of law. Not the Port Morrow. Since 1997 the Port of Morrow, Morrow County Judge and Commissioners, the DEQ, and multiple organizations charged to protect drinking water have known we have a dangerous problem with nitrate well water poisoning yet until now precious little has been done. The Port of Morrow has deliberately, negligently and recklessly poisoned our well water for nearly two decades. Here is the evidence from DEQ documents:

From 2007 to 2009 the DEQ documented 42 violations of 3,620 pounds per acre of excess nitrogen. In 2011 the Port promised a new plan for nitrogen-laced wastewater in place of fines. From 2012 to 2014 the DEQ documented 200 tons of excess nitrogen applied to local farms and dairy land. In 2015 the Port was finally fined \$129,000 for excess nitrogen application. In 2016 the Port was fined \$8,400 for building a storage wastewater pond with no permit. From 2015 to 2017 the Port applied 263 tons of excess nitrogen-laced wastewater, yet the DEQ issued no fine. In 2017 the DEQ issued a new permit forgiving all previous nitrate poisoning provided the Port build a new storage pond, limit the spread of nitrogen wastewater in the winter and build anaerobic digesters to remove significant amounts of nitrogen in the wastewater. As usual the Port reneged on their agreement and hired scientists to argue the nitrogen-laced wastewater was not reaching ground water tables in local wells. From 2017 to 2021 the DEQ documented 1,100 Port nitrate violations with over 165 tons of nitrogen-laced wastewater poured on local farms and dairies. On Jan. 12, 22 the Port was fined \$1,300,000 for "reckless, intentional and negligent" DEQ wastewater violations.

How has the Port Morrow responded to these fines for recklessly poisoning our water? "The violations were unintentional and beyond the reasonable control of the Port and had no adverse effect on groundwater nitrate level. The Port denies it violated its permit by failing to monitor nitrate uptake in crops since there

were no applicable standard methods for monitoring and the DEQ did not provide an agricultural approved method until 2021." (Jan. 31, 22 Capital Press)

It should come as no surprise that on June 12, 2022, the DEQ fined the Port an additional \$800,000 for "adding 96 tons of excess nitrogen on an already contaminated aquifer that is the drinking supply for portions of Morrow and Umatilla County." (Oregon Capital Chronicles, June 17, 22) Nevertheless the Port continues to this day to pour more cancer-causing nitrogen wastewater, polluting area drinking water. The Port continues to justify its contamination as executive Director Lisa Mittlesdorf claims, "By the DEQ's own analysis the Ports industrial waste water reuse program is responsible for less than five percent of the area's nitrates." (Op. Cit. OCC) Past Morrow County Commissioner John Wenzholz used the same chart from the LUBGWMA Action Plan to make the same claim. (Gazette Times June 29, 22). The problem is that chart is no longer accurate using "data from 2004-07." (Second LUBGWMA Action Plan p. 17) Not only is the chart no longer accurate, the five percent claim uses land acreage not the amount of applied nitrogen-laced wastewater to that acreage. Wenzholz complained Commissioner Doherty's emergency nitrate campaign is fear mongering, however no previous Morrow County Commissioners did anything to expose the Port "intentional" poisoning of our well water. Most of the nitrate well water poisoning is coming from Port of Morrow "reckless" nitrate poisoning. To this hour the Port has yet to submit to the DEQ for review and approval a plan to achieve compliance with nitrogen loading limits in the permit. This is an issue only coming lawsuits will force the Port to stop poisoning our water.

The elephant in the room is why has the DEQ failed to protect our local drinking water? The Oregon Groundwater Protection Act of 1989 (ORS 468B.150-190) requires well water to be below seven parts per million nitrate level. Why has the DEQ been subservient to the Port of Morrow? Follow the money, or rather lack of it.

On January 9, 21, days before the Port's \$1,300,000

fine the DEQ received a memo, "urgent for Leah Felder, hold up issuing the notice" from Heppner State Representative Greg Smith. (Water contamination worsened as DEQ went easy on Port of Morrow, Oregon Capital Chronicle (OCC), Baumhardt, Sinanian, Callaway, March 2022) The DEQ was properly ready to fine the Port \$29,000,000. (Op. Cit. OCC). Smith has been a State Representative from Heppner since 2001. He once worked for the Port of Morrow. Smith has a seat on the state legislative powerful budget committee which oversees the DEQ budget. Smith has personal financial ties important to the Port. He receives a salary of \$144,812 for administering the Columbia Development Authority which controls the development of the previous Umatilla Chemical Munitions Depot which is vital to the Port development of which the Port is a partner. In addition, the Port of Morrow has established an economic nonprofit that pays Smith's private company \$100,000 per year. Emails "show Smith stepped in to stall DEQ's new conditions for the Port." (Op. Cit. OCC) The day the Port would be receiving its permit requirements Smith wrote an email to DEQ director Whitman on Nov. 8, 21, "I would respectfully request that you hold off on this until our meeting tomorrow morning." (Op. Cit. OCC) The DEQ twice extended the deadline until Jan. 10, 22. According to DEQ documents the fine should have been \$29 million not \$1.3 million.

Commissioners Lindsey and Doherty are a threat to the sophistry of the Port of Morrow, especially Doherty as the commissioner now oversees the Columbia Development Administration and is responsible for helping expose the Ports nitrogen wastewater abuse. Do not be deceived by this shameful attempt to recall Doherty and Lindsey. The Port makes millions of dollars every year removing the wastewater from food producers and Amazon in co-mingled ponds poisoning our drinking water at the north end. This will get worse when new Amazons come online if action is not taken. Recall the nitrate polluters not the commissioners that expose them.

Stuart Dick
Irrigon

~ Letters to the Editor ~

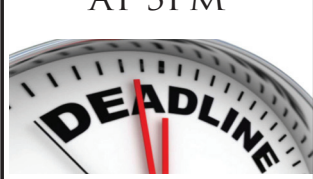
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