

Deuteronomy 30:10-14; Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37; Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/071110.shtml>.

“This is not mysterious and remote. It is not up in the sky or across the sea. It is very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts...”

It never failed to amaze me as a police officer how many times I would hear a victim say something like, “I knew before that something wasn’t right, that something was fishy.” Some people chalk that up to a premonition or ESP- extraordinary sensory perception. Something was in their mind and hearts that gave them a clue that something was amiss. There is something instinctual about this.

When I was in crime prevention, I taught about the basis for this instinct.

How many senses do we have? I had thought we had 5: see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Well, being married to an educator, I found out that we do not have merely five senses; we have 19. We have the biological receptors to apprehend the world in 19 ways. Most of these senses have multi-syllabic names like geogravimetric and ferromagnetic. You can even test yourself on your *proximal* sense. If you close your eyes and start to bring your pointer finger closer and closer to your temple, you may very well experience the finger being close before it touches your skin. I left copies of the list of the 19 senses in the narthex for anyone who is curious.

These 19 senses are further proof of how wonderfully God has designed you for life in this world. Those “premonitions” are from actual sensual input that your subconscious brain has accurately interpreted as “something fishy”. This is OSP-ordinary sensory perception.

I tell people that if the elevator door opens and there is something creepy about going into the elevator, then trust your instinct. Do not say to yourself, “Oh, I’m just being silly.” *Do not* get into the elevator. Act like you forgot something, turn away and wait for the next one. Or cross the street if the walkway in front of you causes you pause. If whatever caused you pause crosses the street also, well then you know your instinct was correct and waste no time in high-tailing it out of there and head for a safe place.

God has designed our hearts in much the same way. You don’t need the Ten Commandments to tell you that it’s wrong to steal and murder. The Golden Rule is called precisely that, because practically every religion, and every culture in every time understands that one should “do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Lk 6:31).

I say all of this so that you can have confidence in how God designed and created you to make the moral choices that you are called upon to make in this world.

And yet, while I encourage you to trust your instinct, I do warn you about trusting your disposition. We are predisposed to keep our selves safe- that’s the survival instinct. We work to make sure we get our fair share of the pie, and if there isn’t enough in our fair share to sustain us, well, we try to get to the pie first. This is survival of the fittest. We react pretty dependably to situations that stimulate our pleasure responses and we seek to repeat those situations. These reactions are not bad in themselves and so I want to avoid the question as to whether humans are inherently good or evil. We are creatures of the clay and we seek to survive. One can see, though, how some may seek to survive at the expense of others. Even Paul expressed frustration with himself when he said “For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want.” (Rm 7:19)

And yet compassion is also built into our bones. Anthropological studies of ancient hominids show bones that had healed from fractures. This is distinct from other mammals. When animals break a leg, they are abandoned and die. Their bones don’t heal. Healed human bones are evidence that, in our pre-historical hunting and gathering tribes, when someone broke a leg, they were carried along and cared for until recovery.

Still, we need to keep an honest and open eye on our dispositions. Does my choice benefit me, benefit others, at the expense of others?

That was the choice that was put at the feet of the priest and the Levite, the upstanding members of the Jewish community. When they came upon the stripped, half-dead body of the robber’s victim, they had no way of telling if the victim was a Jew or not. If not a Jew, then there would be something unclean about him. There was no responsibility to tend to a non-Jew. If the victim died, yet again they would be made unclean by contact with a dead body. These men were likely en route to something important. It might have been even to deliver some good ministry or service. If they were put in the state of being “unclean” they might not even be able to minister and serve until after a period of purification. The victim represented a detour to their travel and mission of the day. They were disposed to look at where they were headed and not at the need at their feet.

Of course, if the victim had only consulted previously with his local crime prevention practitioner, he might have avoided the whole robbery in the first place. But, I don’t think that was Jesus’ point.

But just as I said earlier that we are creatures of the clay... by virtue of God breathing his spirit into us at creation, we are also creatures of the divine. It was that spirit in the Samaritan that recognized the same spirit in the victim. Regardless of ethnic and religious background, the victim shared the Samaritan’s humanity and divinity. He was cared for the way we naturally care for our children. That’s God’s care. That’s divine.

And so when we are embroiled in our duties and responsibilities, and who of us in the 21st Century is not embroiled, how do we respond when someone in need is plopped right in front of us?

I use Jesus' example of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1ff). Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to his date with destiny. But there, when he was passing through Jericho he spotted a funny looking man in a tree trying to get a glimpse of him. Recognizing the man's need, the trip was delayed a day so that Jesus could spend the night with this reviled tax collector. Now do you think Jesus had been en route to something important... like the salvation of the cosmos? If Jesus hadn't delayed at Zaccaeus' house, he might have arrived in Jerusalem a day early. We might be talking about Good Thursday and Easter Saturday if he had.

And so are you too focussed on your mission to help a robber's victim or to spot a Zacchaeus in a tree? Are you too busy to stop and listen to a stranger, a friend, a spouse, or a child? Recognize God's breath in the other. It is the same spirit that makes you truly human.

It *is* more than can be asked of any creature. But by openness to God's grace, by coming to this table and being filled by God's presence, we are empowered to be more.

Trust your instincts. You are wonderfully made.

Be honest about your disposition... for fear that we choose at the expense of others.

Embrace God's grace to serve his presence in one another.

Who is the neighbor? "He answered, 'The one who treated him with mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"