

Brothers and sisters,

The Gospel we have just heard, chosen by the Pope for this year's World Day of the Sick, is one of the most beautiful and evocative parables told by Jesus. We are all familiar with the parable of Good Samaritan. We hear it today while keeping in mind what is lived here at Hôtel-Dieu de France: the mission of the hospital, the situation of the sick and sometimes suffering persons, and the work of all caregivers, regardless of their status, as well as the administrative staff, who every day serve this mission. But beyond what is lived here at HDF, this Gospel also reaches us in our own personal lives, those of our families, our relationships, and our country. We know well that all of us, in one way or another, either personally or through those who live around us are concerned by these realities of suffering, abandonment, and indifference, and by the challenge of compassion, care, attention, and the kind of gaze that leaves no one by the roadside. We can say that this Gospel narrative still challenges us today. It questions our lives, unsettles the comfort of our consciences, sometimes asleep or distracted and warns us against the risk of a complacent faith, settled in the external observance of the law but incapable of feeling and acting with the same compassionate heart of God. Compassion, indeed, lies at the heart of the parable. And this compassion is first expressed in the simplest way through a gaze. Before the wounded man lying by the roadside after falling among bandits, it is said of the priest and then of the Levite: "He saw him and passed by on the other side" (v. 32). By contrast, the text tells us, the Samaritan "saw him and was moved with compassion" (v. 33).

Dear brothers and sisters, I believe this Gospel invites us to care for the way we look. What do we look at? Whom do we look at? How do we look? Weariness, fatigue, boredom, and worries can dull our gaze toward others. Some people may sometimes escape our notice; we no longer even see them, and in a certain way, they cease to exist. Our gaze is also so often captured by our phone screens that we spend more time absorbed by images that are usually of little value and that draw us away from where we truly need to be here and now where care must be given, where we must look at the one who is present, waiting for our presence, hoping for a gaze that restores dignity and shows that he or she is worthy of attention.

In fact, the gaze makes all the difference, because it expresses what we carry in our hearts. There is an outward, distracted, hurried vision that pretends not to see, that refuses to be touched or challenged by the situation. And there is the vision of the heart, with a deeper gaze, marked by empathy, that allows us to enter the other person's situation, to participate inwardly, to be touched and moved, and to question our lives and our responsibility.

The gaze spoken of in the parable is the gaze of God. It is the gaze that God continually casts upon each of us. The challenge, brothers and sisters, is to enter God's way of acting, to enter the gaze God casts upon us as upon every person. We all have the same value in God's eyes. The Good Samaritan is, above all, the image of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son whom the Father sent into history precisely because He looked upon humanity without passing it by.

Today, the road descending from Jerusalem toward Jericho, a city located below sea level, is the road taken by all those who sink into evil, suffering, and poverty. It is the road of many people weighed down by difficulties or wounded by life's circumstances. It is the road of all those who descend ever lower until they are lost and reach rock bottom. It is also the road of many peoples stripped, robbed, and plundered victims of oppressive political systems, of an economy that forces them into poverty, and of war that destroys their dreams and their lives. Like the man descending from Jerusalem to Jericho, humanity descends into the abysses of death and, even

today as we know well it often must face the darkness of evil, suffering, poverty, and the absurdity of death. But God looked upon us with compassion. He chose to walk our road Himself; He came down among us and, in Jesus, the Good Samaritan, He came to care for each person.

The Gospel we hear today therefore renews God's invitation to act as He does to look upon others and their suffering as He does. Since Christ is the manifestation of a compassionate God, to believe in Him and to follow Him as His disciples means allowing ourselves to be transformed so that we too may share His sentiments: a heart that is moved, a gaze that sees and does not pass by, hands that help and soothe wounds, and strong shoulders that carry the burden of those in need.

Brothers and sisters, let us remember all the times when, in one way or another, the Lord cared for our lives and set us back on the path of life. He cared for us at moments in our existence when it was not self-evident, and for many reasons. He cared for us and looked after us. And He wishes that we do the same that we care for suffering humanity. Sometimes we are satisfied simply with doing our duty, which is already a great deal, or we consider our neighbor only as someone who belongs to our circle, our community, someone who thinks like us. But Jesus overturns this perspective by presenting a Samaritan an outsider, even a heretic who becomes neighbor to the wounded man. And He asks us to do the same.

Brothers and sisters, to see and truly look at every person, to stop our frantic rush, to no longer let our screens dominate our lives, and not to allow indispensable technological progress to make us forget the human person, this is what the Lord calls us to do.

May this parable be the compass guiding the way we look, act, and conceive our mission here at Hôtel-Dieu de France, so that each person, beginning with those who come here to be treated, may feel recognized, respected, and loved.

Amen.

Fr. François Boëdec, S.J.