

The Full and True Story of the Good Samaritan

(as told by the youths of a Lagos parish)

We were holding a Day of Prayer for the youth of St Mary's Catholic Parish, Ajegunle, in Lagos, Nigeria. At the Mass for the day, the Gospel reading was Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37) While I was slowly reading the gospel, a group of young men mimed the story in the area around the altar. The congregation of young people watched and listened closely. Only minimal rehearsal had been needed; the story was familiar to them all. And, as happens, there was high drama, and a certain amount of audience participation.

After the Gospel and the drama, I was giving a homily, during which – on the spur of the moment, without having alerted the actors – I began to ask them what they had felt in the roles assigned to them. The inside story, as you might say.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead...

In the parable the first traveller to come upon the battered victim was a priest: so, I asked the actor, why had he passed by on the other side? "It is a pity, but you see I was going to another mission station to bring them Mass, and I was late, and I couldn't deprive them." And the young actor brandished his bona fides: the large red altar missal he was carrying!

The second passer-by in the story was a Levite, a Temple official – why had he avoided the injured man? "Well, you know the fashion of armed-robbers now! When they beat someone, they leave them there and hide themselves – so they can catch whoever else might stop to help. My advice is, don't hang around such a place." And the actor demonstrated – again – how he had speeded up and away from the scene of the crime. It was a popular move.



He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. (Luke 10:34) *Le Bon Samaritain – The Good Samaritan.* ©Vie de Jesus MAFA

The third one to come upon the injured man was a Samaritan, a traditional hate-figure for many of the Jews; the feeling was mutual. And I asked the youth who had played this part, why had he gone to the aid of the one who had been robbed? "But you must go! At least to see if he is alive or dead! And you do the much you can, wherever he comes from."

I was amazed at the way the young actors had entered into the characters they were portraying, totally unrehearsed and unprepared. And the honesty of their answers. I was moving on in the homily, when a young lady in the congregation, one of the youth group, stood up and called, "What of the victim? Has he nothing to say?" It hadn't even crossed my mind! So, myself feeling a little chastened, I asked the "victim" what he had felt in the role of the man robbed and left for dead; and then saved by "The Good Samaritan."

He was hesitant and slow to reply. "I felt ashamed," he said, with a touch of wonder in his voice. "Here was my enemy, and he showed love to me. I thought of all the times I would not trust a Samaritan; I even despised them. I never was friends with any of them. And this Samaritan stranger stopped to help me in my hour of need!"

As you can imagine, that was the end of my homily! There was nothing more I wanted or needed to say. Happy Easter! ■

Fr Dermot Connolly spent many years in Nigeria and now works in the District of Ireland.