



## A BETTER KIND OF POLITICS

Civilize It

# Scripture Meditation: Pope Francis and the Parable of the Good Samaritan

This Scripture meditation on the parable of the good Samaritan is inspired by Pope Francis's reflections in his encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti* [*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*]. This meditation is for anyone who desires to reflect more deeply on the call to love our neighbors, whoever they may be. In particular we reflect in this guide on the call to love across differences in political and theological perspectives.

## Begin with Prayer

Begin your time of reflection by asking God to be present with you. Pray this **Prayer to Listen, Heal and Respond** from the *Fratelli Tutti Study Guide*, session 4.

**Loving God**, give us hearts that listen for your word.

**Let us imitate the Good Samaritan**, who does not turn away from suffering.

**Help us listen**. May we listen to those who struggle daily for dignity. Let us hear your voice in the stories of those on the margins.

**Help us always see** what binds us together as sisters and brothers.

**Help us to heal**. May we be willing to stand in the place of others.

**Let us be open** to difference that we may arrive at understanding.

**Help us to seek reconciliation** that our world may reflect justice.

**Help us respond**. May our faith move us to action in the public square. Let us work with others of good will, finding solutions together.

**Help us exercise political charity**, seeking the common good and dignity for all.

Lord, give us the courage to trust in your hand guiding us. **Give us the courage** to respond like the Good Samaritan, setting aside divisions to attend to the needs of the other.

**May we know and see your love present** in our communities, made real in the ways we love one another. Amen.

## Pause with Pope Francis

Today we will reflect on the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke (10:25-37). If you are not already familiar with this passage, you may read it now. We often understand this parable of the Good Samaritan as an invitation to help our neighbors in need. In *Fratelli Tutti*, nos. 80-83, Pope Francis asks us to broaden our understanding of neighbor so that it also includes anyone “outside” of our group, perspective, or identity. We must “draw near” to all and practice a universal love that “transcends all prejudices, all historical and cultural barriers.”

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes of the need to recover “the sense of belonging to a single human family.” After all, “we are all in

the same boat” (no. 30). This is in stark contrast to the tendency, which has become commonplace, to disengage from difficult conversations and see only our own interests and perspectives. In addition, we may lack the desire to truly work together to identify shared interests and pursue the common good. Pope Francis challenges us: “Isolation and withdrawal into one’s own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal” (no. 30). Instead of “the inclination to be concerned only with myself, my group, my own petty interests” (no. 166), we must discover how to be neighbor to all and to seek the common good together.

## Read the Parable

Prepare to read the Parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke (10:25-37). Before you begin, ask Jesus to be with you, helping you to understand the meaning of this passage in relation to your own life and experiences. Then read the passage. Read slowly and intentionally, taking as much time as you need. If a word or phrase strikes you, feel free to pause and consider its meaning or importance to you at this time.

## Reflect

Now spend time with at least one of the following questions. Do not feel a need to answer all questions in one sitting. Consider using a prayer journal to jot down your thoughts and reflections. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

- Prior to the act of assisting the wounded man, the Good Samaritan made a decision to encounter someone who was different than him. *What encounter might you be called to with people who are different than you?*
- The motivation for encounter is love—in imitation of Jesus and the Good

Samaritan. *Toward whom do I need to cultivate greater love in order to be prepared for encounter?*

- Through the characters of the priest and the Levite, Jesus warns us against passing by our neighbor. *How does choosing distance over encounter not only neglect the neighbor, but also negatively impact the one who passes by? What is lost in the failure to encounter?*
- Conversely, what might be gained in the willingness to engage in the act of encounter? *How might the act of encounter make both the wounded man and the Samaritan more whole?*
- Affected by what we hear in the media, in partisan politics, and even in local communities, we often feel far from ready to encounter those with whom we disagree. *What can I do to prepare my heart for openness to encounter?*

## Re-read the Parable and Imagine

Now read the passage again. Enter into the passage more fully through contemplation that uses your senses and imagination. For example, begin by imagining the setting—the dry land, the rocky path. What do you see? Can you feel a breeze? What does the air smell like? How is the weather?

Choose to experience the story from the perspective of a particular character. You may imagine the story, for example, from the perspective of the Good Samaritan. What do you look like? What clothes do you wear? Are you sweating under the hot sun? Where are you headed?

To add an additional layer of meaning, you may choose to imagine the wounded victim as a person from your own life. Select someone who has perspectives different from your own—someone with whom you have found the act of encounter to be very difficult.



Imagine how it feels to come across this person wounded on the road. How do you feel when you encounter him or her? Is your initial reaction a sense of dread? How is the experience of offering aid, setting the victim on your own donkey, and accompanying this person closely on the ride to the inn?

Read the passage slowly, pausing often and for as much time as you need in order to allow Christ to speak to you and teach you through your imaginative contemplation.

## Examine Your Heart

When you are finished experiencing the passage, spend time in prayer. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand how you may be called to respond or to relate differently to others.

For Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*, the very act of encounter is transformational. Through encounter, we learn that “the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others”(no. 66). We remember that we were created to love and that we come to know ourselves more through our relationships with others (no. 69). As a result, we must ask ourselves: how am I changed by this act of encounter with my neighbor? How do I know Christ — and myself — better through encountering others? And finally, what changes in my heart and in my actions must this encounter lead to?

Ask Christ to help you discern how to respond to the call to encounter. Ask for the awareness that he is at your side as you engage in the act of encounter. Ask Christ to help you to see him in the person whom you encounter.

It is important to recognize that transformation through encounter goes beyond our own individual transformation.

For Pope Francis, “The parable shows us how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbors” (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 67). Through the act of encounter we strengthen our communities.

If you are journeying with others in this prayer experience, pause now to share with another person about a past experience of encounter. What did that experience teach you about yourself and others, and about Christ? What do you plan to do to respond to Pope Francis's invitation in *Fratelli Tutti*? What are you excited about? What are you anxious about? Is there any support you can offer one another as you take the next step on this journey of encounter?

When you are ready, conclude your time of prayer with an Our Father or a Glory Be.

## Go Forth

*Having spent time reflecting with Pope Francis on Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, take steps to foster encounter and dialogue in your family or other community.*

Many resources are available to assist you. Visit the USCCB's *Civilize It: A Better Kind of Politics* initiative at [CivilizeIt.org](https://www.civilizeit.org) for additional prayer resources, guides, and activities aimed to overcome divisions and seek the common good.

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