

For Migrants Fleeing Their Homes

It was a lawyer who asked Jesus in the Gospel, 'Who is my neighbour?' He was probably expecting a definition that would determine the limits of his obligations. Did 'neighbour' refer to his immediate community, or did it extend beyond that to the whole village? Should people living nearby in the countryside be considered neighbours also? What about those of a different race or religion? And what about trouble-makers and criminals: should they too be thought of as neighbours?

Instead of giving a definition, Jesus told a story: about an unfortunate man who had been beaten, robbed and left half dead by the side of the road. Several respectable members of society heard his cry for help but ignored him. But one passer-by – a Samaritan – heard the man's groans, was moved with compassion and came to his rescue. He bandaged his

wounds, brought him to an inn, and even offered to pay his expenses. Having heard the story, the lawyer acknowledged that it was the despised Samaritan who truly was a neighbour to the unfortunate man. Jesus then concluded, 'Go, and do the same yourself'.

If Jesus were to tell the story today, perhaps he would tell it differently. He might talk about a family of Ukrainian refugees who have to flee their home in Mariupol. Leaving all their possessions behind, desperately hoping to find security for their children, after months of rejection they eventually arrive in a small village in the west of Ireland. There they are welcomed by the community, given shelter by a local family, and warmly accepted into the local school. Or maybe Jesus would tell another story: about those who set out – often defying official regulations – to rescue migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean in flimsy boats about to sink. Or perhaps he would talk about those who dedicate themselves to rescuing vulnerable women who are being trafficked, and sexually exploited. There are so many stories Jesus could tell about today's Good Samaritans who come to the aid of our migrant neighbours. His parting words would remain unchanged, however: 'Go, and do the same yourself'.

From Patrick Carberry SJ, *Living Prayer* 2024, Messenger Publications, 2023.

Pope's Intention:

We pray that migrants fleeing from war or hunger, forced to undertake journeys full of danger and violence, find welcome and new opportunities in the countries that receive them.