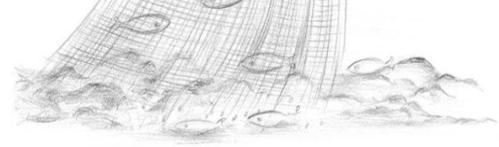




Journey of Enrichment

2011 - Year of Shared Spirituality

"Put out into deep water,
and let down the nets for a catch." Luke 5,4



Compassion and Mercy A Quality of the Heart, a New Way of Relating

Following on our reflection on the Heart of God/ The Good Shepherd, we now invite you to go deeper into the merciful and compassionate Heart of God.

You may ask yourself where does compassion begin and end. Are you moved to compassion only when you see or hear of someone's suffering? How do you decide who receives your compassion and who doesn't? How do you show compassion when you are feeling in need of compassion yourself?

Most definitions of compassion refer to it as initiated by or responding to something outside of ourselves.¹ We are moved to compassion because of something that happened to someone else, and we feel so much for the one who suffers that we desire to alleviate that suffering.

God's mercy and compassion however defy human definition. The Hebrew Scriptures reveal God's mercy in the story of Salvation, using two expressions in particular - "hesed" for "love that gives, love more powerful than betrayal, grace stronger than sin", and "rahamim" for "maternal love that is good, tender, patient, understanding and ready to forgive"².

Jesus is God's mercy and compassion made visible. His amazing compassion is revealed in stories of healing, feeding, forgiving of huge debts, rejoicing in the conversion of sinners. Jesus tells us, "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate." (Lk 6:36)

By their very lives, in word and deed, SJE and SME bore witness to the compassion and mercy of God. Their great desire was to communicate the love of Jesus which they had personally experienced. From their adoration of God and being immersed in God's compassion, they reached out in practical expressions of that compassion to women wounded by life's experiences. They both followed the three elements outlined by SJE : first to be touched by the distress of others; secondly to have a desire to help them and thirdly to move from being willing to help to actually doing something concrete³.

We also experience moments when we are touched by God's compassion especially when we face the truth about ourselves; our gifts and our shadows. This energises us to reach out to others, not in

¹ Definitions from various dictionaries listed in Reflection on the theme of the Congregational Chapter 2009. Supporting Document on Compassion, September 2008.

² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia*, (30 November 1980) Chapter 3, footnote 52.

³ Cf St. John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, Chapter 8.

pity, but in a sense of feeling our common vulnerability with those whom we serve. Having received and experienced the mercy and compassion of God, we are empowered to show mercy and compassion to others. (1 Peter 2:10) Our compassion must be “distinguished by the fact that we not merely meet the needs of the moment, but that we dedicate ourselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity.”⁴ And we also receive mercy from them⁵ as we share our existence as fragile human beings.

God’s compassion reaches out to and embraces all of creation. God wants us to reverence creation and to care for it responsibly. (cf Gen 1:28) Being fully human in the 21st century requires being intimately involved with caring for the earth. Compassion for the earth and its scarce resources and fostering a reverential mentality towards the natural environment is a religious responsibility for our time.

Questions for Reflection and Sharing

How have you experienced the mercy and compassion of God? How have you shown mercy and compassion? Think of someone whom you feel needs your compassion. How can you show mercy and compassion to that person?

What efforts are you making to honour the scarce resources of the earth in your local area? How are you supporting global efforts at conservation and preserving the natural environment?

Prayer

Creator God, you are loving and forgiving, slow to anger and rich in mercy. Awaken us to your Spirit who dwells in us and in all of creation, uniting us in your eternal plan of salvation. May we walk humbly in the footsteps of your son Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who models for us your infinite mercy and compassion.

Suggested reading:

1. Reflection on the Theme of the Congregational Chapter 2009: Compassion, September 2008. www.buonpastoreint.org: C.Spirituality Center, Congregational Chapter 2009 (Good Shepherd website).
2. Judy Cannato, *Field of Compassion : How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life*, Sorin Books 2010 (English)
3. John Paul II, Encyclical letter, *Dives in Misericordia*. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-inmisericordia_en.html
4. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html

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⁴ Cf Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005.

⁵ Cf SME Conference 4