

Spiritual Reflection on the Virtue of Compassion

Though one often hears the words compassion and sympathy used interchangeably, there is a distinct difference. Compassion goes beyond sympathy. Compassion is heartfelt concern for another person's suffering or need, *accompanied by action* to help better the situation.

The Bible recounts many instances of Christ's own compassion. We read, for example:

When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. Matthew 14:14

And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they may faint on the way." Matthew 15:32

Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him. Matthew 20:34

With compassion, there is action; and Christ, indeed, took action. He did not just feel sympathy for someone's hunger, or illness, or sorrow. We know that He fed the hungry, cured the deaf and the blind, healed the sick, and brought the dead back to life upon seeing those who grieved for them. But Christ's greatest act of compassion was for all of humankind: His dying in order to save the world. Because of His love and compassion for us, He freed us from sin and death through the Cross and Resurrection. And because of this ultimate act of love and compassion, we are able to share in eternal life with God.

With Christ as our example, how can we not show compassion to others? With Christ as our example, we must do more than just feel sympathy for another's suffering and need. We, too, must act to help better their situation. Let us strive to replace the cries of those suffering from poverty, illness, or injustice with peace, justice, joy, hope, comfort, and love. It is our responsibility. As St. Teresa of Avila wrote:

*Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which He looks
compassion on this world
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

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