



Compassion

Year of Mercy Booklet

Introductory

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy opened on 8 December 2015 by Pope Francis. It is the Pope's desire that the Church will become 'steeped in mercy, so that we go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God!' (Bull of Indiction, 5) This is because Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy, so we need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. Our salvation depends on this Mercy as it is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.

Mercy is also the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. It is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. It is also the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness (Bull of indiction, 2). Let us become attentive to this mercy so that we can be witnesses of God's mercy and compassion to the world.



Prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.

Show us your face and we will be saved.

Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.

Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the
Samaritan woman:

“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.

You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with His anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of
Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever
and ever.

Amen.



The logo and the motto together provide a fitting summary of what the Jubilee Year is all about

The motto Merciful Like the Father (taken from the Gospel of Luke, 6:36) serves as an invitation to follow the merciful example of the Father who asks us not to judge or condemn but to forgive and to give love and forgiveness without measure (cfr. Lk 6:37-38). The logo – the work of Jesuit Father Marko I. Rupnik – presents a small summa theologiae of the theme of mercy.

In fact, it represents an image quite important to the early Church: that of the Son having taken upon his shoulders the lost soul demonstrating that it is the love of Christ that brings to completion the mystery of his incarnation culminating in redemption. The logo has been designed in such a way so as to express the profound way in which the Good Shepherd touches the flesh of humanity and does so with a love with the power to change one's life. One particular feature worthy of note is that while the Good Shepherd, in his great mercy, takes humanity upon himself, his eyes are merged with those of man. Christ sees with the eyes of Adam, and Adam with the eyes of Christ. Every person discovers in Christ, the new Adam, one's own humanity and the future that lies ahead, contemplating, in his gaze, the love of the Father.

The scene is captured within the so called mandorla (the shape of an almond), a figure quite important in early and medieval iconography, for it calls to mind the two natures of Christ, divine and human. The three concentric ovals, with colors progressively lighter as we move outward, suggest the movement of Christ who carries humanity out of the night of sin and death. Conversely, the depth of the darker color suggests the impenetrability of the love of the Father who forgives all.

Corporal Works and Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Kind acts to help our neighbours with material and physical needs – we call these the Corporal works of Mercy like:
 - feed the hungry
 - give drink to the thirsty
 - clothe the naked
 - shelter the homeless
 - visit the sick
 - visit the imprisoned
 - bury the dead
- Acts of compassion to help our neighbours with emotional and spiritual needs – we call these the Spiritual works of Mercy like:
 - counsel the doubtful
 - instruct the ignorant
 - admonish sinners
 - comfort the afflicted
 - forgive offences
 - bear wrongs patiently
 - pray for the living and the dead

After each act of Mercy, take note of how your act has impacted the recipient, jot down your thoughts and feelings. How can you act on these rising thoughts and feelings? Take concrete steps to realize them.

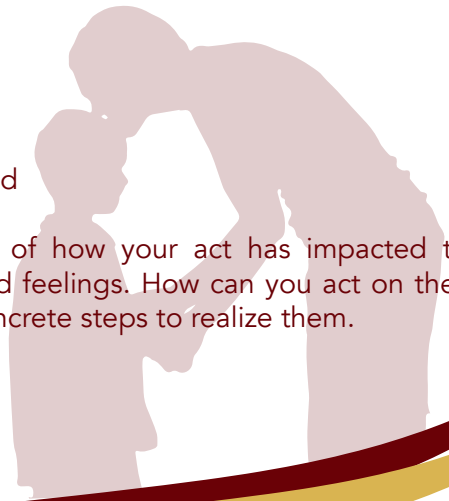




Photo credits : www.cnn.com

Compassion

Session One

Deeper knowing of 'Compassion'

Pope Francis embraces Vinicio Riva, 53, during his Nov. 6, 2013, general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. Riva, who is afflicted with neurofibromatosis, said receiving the pope's embrace was like being in paradise. (CNS/EPA/Claudio Peri)

Many of us sat up when this picture first appeared showing Pope Francis warmly embracing Vinicio Riva who suffers from neurofibromatosis. There are some who commented that this is what Jesus would do. Look at the picture again, it is a simple gesture of the Pope embracing someone, yet, it is a powerful picture with a strong

message. Let the picture speak to you and share what you have discovered.

Scripture

'For the Lord does not reject mankind for ever and ever. If he has punished, he has compassion so great is his kindness; since he takes no pleasure in abasing and afflicting the human race.'

(Lamentations 3:31-32)

'So you put them at the mercy of their enemies who oppressed them. But when they were being oppressed and called to you, you heard them from heaven and because of your great compassion you gave them deliverers who rescued them from their oppressors' clutches. But once at peace again, again they did what was wrong before you; so you put them at the mercy of their enemies who then became their rulers. When they called to you again, you heard them from heaven and, because of your compassion, rescued them many times.' (Nehemiah 9:27-28)



- **Having read the two scripture texts, what can you say about compassion now?**

Reflection

'Compassion' is defined as "a strong feeling of sympathy for people who are suffering and a desire to help them" according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. It is a passion to desire a different experience for someone who is in pain or suffering. Perhaps a differentiation between compassion and pity will help us to understand this concept of 'compassion' better.

To feel 'pity' for someone has the notion of seeing the other as 'less than' and so may prevent the other from growing from the pain and suffering. On the other hand, 'compassion' has the notion of empathy that allows one to walk along side the other to lend support, holding a safe-space for the person to heal and grow.

When we speak of a God of compassion from the Christian perspective, we need to understand that the fundamental essence of God is love. It is from this love that compassion flows. There is a word in Hebrew that conveys this love of God that we cannot find expressed in English. The word is 'Hesed'. It expresses a love that is based on a covenantal relationship and carries the meaning of steadfastness, rock-solid faithfulness that endures to eternity. This love persists beyond sin or betrayal to mend brokenness and extend forgiveness even to the undeserved. It is more than just feelings; it is action that intervenes on behalf of loved ones to rescue them because of unswerving loyalty. There is no question of deserving, it is not about the excitement of romance but a dogged faithfulness to act 'love' in faithful, enduring and eternal ways.

Compassion, then, comes from this enduring and eternal love so as to support and lend strength for those who are in need because we can feel the pain, the brokenness and we want to help the other to experience 'wholeness' again.



• Have you experienced God's compassion? Where and how?

Living 'Compassion'

'You are God's chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love.'
(Col 3:12-14)

The text from Colossians spells out the way of living as Christians. Compassion is the essential foundation to this life of following Christ. Recall how you felt when you first experienced God's compassionate love. Learn to put on the eye of compassion and begin to notice those around you who need support and comfort. Then go and give compassionate love, as God would want you to.

If this reflection is done in a community, members can decide how to incorporate compassion into the life of the community. It can be within the inner mission of the community by doing and living compassion or it can be the outer mission of bringing compassion to others around.

For self, begin by recalling how you have experienced compassion. How did you experience 'wholeness'? Take note of the feelings that are surfacing. Put on the 'eye of compassion' now and see if there is someone who needs to experience compassion. Go and find out more about the situation.

Pray

Heavenly Father, we thank you for teaching us compassion by your faithful and enduring love. Help us to put on compassion so as to learn of your mercy and forgiveness. We pray in Jesus' name, your Son, Amen.



In Brief:

- Feeling 'pity' has the notion that the other person is 'less than'. Having 'compassion' is to walk along side, holding a space for healing and growth.
- This compassion comes from the faithful, enduring love of God who cannot and would not abandon us.
- Compassion is a deep desire for the other person to experience 'wholeness'.
- Being compassionate is the way of being a Christian – to have sincere compassion, acting kindly and sincerely with humility and gentleness. (Col 3:12-14)

Find out more about compassion from the Good Samaritan story in session 2.





The Good Samaritan by Van Gogh (after Delacroix) 1890. Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands

Session Two

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Scripture

Luke 10: 33-36

“But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have.’”



Reflection

Let us contemplate on this painting by Van Gogh of the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. It is obvious that the Samaritan traveler is really struggling to help the injured man to get onto the donkey. Notice that the donkey is also straining to remain still for the Samaritan traveler to help the injured man to mount the animal. It certainly looks burdensome and conveys the extent of trouble that the Samaritan traveler goes through to help this man.

The drawing also highlights how intertwined the two men become in the process of this good deed, notwithstanding that they are supposed to be arch enemies.

It is 'compassion' that allows the Samaritan to stop and get into the messy situation of the injured man. He could have walked on just like the other two men! (Notice the two figures walking ahead in the drawing). Instead, we are told in the Gospel that he looked after the injured man till the next day and then instructed the innkeeper to care for the man before getting on with his own business.

'Compassion' compels us to get into the other person's shoes to feel and empathize with the other. It also allows us to act on that feeling to extend help. Often, this would involve putting aside one's own schedule and agenda to attend to the immediate needs of the other.

- **Is there someone who has shown compassion to you? How?**
- **Think of someone you can show compassion to. Why this person? How will you show compassion?**



God cannot abandon us - this is the extent of God's love for us. No matter the number of times we fail in our relationship with God; no matter the times we forget and think that we can do without God, God cannot and would not abandon us! If we only turn and admit our wrong doings, God is always there to welcome us back. Compassion comes from this deep love God has for us. When we are faced with such love and compassion that we have done nothing to deserve, we can only try our best to love and be compassionate to others because everything else would come up short. We are compassionate because of God's compassionate love for us, so even though being compassionate would take us out from our comfort zone and 'inconvenience' us, we cannot turn it down if we profess that we love God.

Living 'Compassion'

How often do I hold myself back from helping others because I am afraid that it will be 'troublesome'? What are the blockages that prevent me from extending compassion and help to others? Do I want to change? What can I do?

Pray

Merciful Father, we thank you for loving us so much by sending your son to our messy situations to teach us compassion. Give us the grace to learn compassionate love by getting into the shoes of the others. In so doing, may we love as you have loved us. Amen.

In Brief:

- Compassion compels us to empathize with the other.
 - We act on the feeling of empathy to extend help.
- Often, we need to go through inconvenience such as putting aside our work to extend help to others. This is compassionate love.

We learn more about living compassion in session 3.



Photo credits : www.bbc.com

Session 3

Living a compassionate life

This photo was taken when the Pope visited the Philippines in 2015. The Pope was with the street children from Manila. Look at the photo and notice where the Pope is seated.

What does it say about compassion that you have discovered so far?

Scripture:

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. (Is 49:15-16)

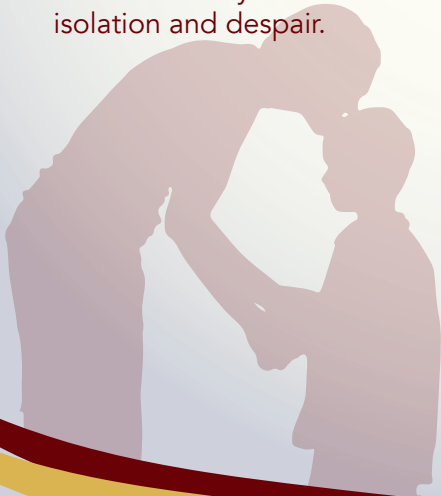
What does this text say to you about compassion?



Reflection:

We have learned that compassion is not coming down from a privileged position to sympathize with those who are hurting or suffering. Instead, it is to enter into the place or source of suffering, to walk alongside providing support for healing and growth. This is the compassion of God, by becoming human, walking among us to point us the way for fullest of life. However, such a notion of compassion is 'disturbing'. It is not how we understand life because competition seems to be the key motivation for us. 'Survival of the fittest' is the driving force for our lives in order to be successful; I need to be the best, the strongest and the fastest. Compassion will 'slow' me down. Compassion will cost me to lose. This, however, is the way of Christian living if we truly want to be a follower of Jesus.

How can we live a life of compassionate love? Jesus shows us that the first step is obedience to the will of God. This obedience is done freely by us because we have experienced and encounter the faithful enduring love of God. Compassion is also not an isolated act but a way of life in community. It is in community that one is reminded of the 'other'. We do not become self-centered but learn to walk in each other's shoes. By living out compassion, the community becomes a sign of hope for the world that is filled with isolation and despair.





In order to grow compassionate communities, we need to learn to move out of our comfort zones into the lives of those who are suffering and are in need. It is 'pity' if we are helping the people from a distance; in our comfort area. Compassionate community calls us into a space and place that we rather not go because things can be messy. It is here that we can learn and grow in compassion. Then we need to exercise patience. Patience is not to hurry through things but to give time to each other. It is about being present to each other, allowing each one to experience compassion. Prayer is also important for the growth of compassionate community. In prayer, we learn to give attention to those in needs, bringing the sufferings and needs of others before God. This prayer ought to lead us into actions to alleviate the sufferings and bring about healing and wholeness.

A compassionate community offers a glimpse of the kingdom of God where suffering is no more. This is the motivation for us to be compassionate because we look towards the glory of the kingdom.

- **Am I ready to live a life of compassion now that I know its importance?**
- **How can the community help each member to live a life of compassion?**
- **What are some concerns I may still have regarding adopting this compassionate lifestyle? What can I do about it?**



Pray

Compassionate Father, you send your son Jesus to become man and live among men. Help us to grow hearts of compassion so that the world may know your glory. Amen.

In Brief:

- To adopt a compassionate life is a challenge because we live in a society that values competition.
 - First step towards compassion is obedience to God. It is a free decision made by the people because they have encountered the lasting and enduring love of God.
 - Compassion is a way of life in the Christian community.
- Patience and prayer are key ingredients for growing compassion.
 - A compassionate community living in compassion, mercy and forgiveness offers a glimpse to the glory of the Kingdom of God.

Next:

Look out for booklets on Mercy and Forgiveness.



Notes:





Resource of the Office for the New Evangelisation
Year of Mercy