

Message for Week 6: Have Compassion

*“Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?
(Matthew 18:33)*

Compassion

“Love is to feel the joy of another as joy in oneself” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 47). God created us in His own image and likeness so that we could receive His love and wisdom as if it were our own; so that we could love people as He loves people, and rejoice as He rejoices. “These things I have spoken to you,” Jesus said, “That My joy might remain in you and that your joy may be full” (John 16:). So sharing other people’s happiness is a key part of love. Yet the ability to share others’ happiness goes hand in hand with the ability to feel their grief and pain, so love also involves compassion.

The English word “compassion” literally means “suffering with.” (The word passion means both “intense feeling,” and “suffering” (as in the “passion” of Jesus Christ). The words “empathy” and “sympathy” have similar meanings from the same root. “Commiseration” is similar-- “to be miserable with.” One of my favorites is the Latin word *miser cordia*. It is often translated as “compassion” or “mercy,” and literally it means “misery of the heart.” When we love someone who is suffering, we feel miserable at heart: compassion, empathy, sympathy or commiseration.

“The reason why 'showing compassion' means the good coming from love is that all compassion is an expression of love, for people who have love or kindness also have compassion; and their love and kindness become compassion (or “misery of the heart”) when their neighbor is poor or in misery and in that situation they give help. This is why 'compassion' means the good that comes from love.” (Secrets of Heaven 6180)

Compassion is a Divine quality. The Lord said to Moses at the burning bush, “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows” (Exodus 3:7). We read in the Psalms that “the Lord is full of compassion” (Psalm 78:38, 86:15, 111:4, 112:4, 145:8), and Isaiah prophesies that when He came into the world the Messiah would be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.... Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3,4). And sure enough, that is the kind of compassion that Jesus displayed: “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). “He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick” (Matthew 14:4). Then He taught us that we should have compassion on each other as He does on us. “Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant,” He asks, “just as I had pity on you?” (Matthew 18:33). He tells us to be like the Good Samaritan, who had compassion on a wounded man (Luke 10:33).

The Brothers’ Test

One of the greatest stories of compassion in the Word is that of Joseph and his brothers. We have been following this story for a number of weeks, and now it is coming full circle. When

Joseph was seventeen his brothers had sold him as a slave, thinking only of their own profit and having no pity for Joseph in the pit. Years later the tables were turned and Joseph held all the power of Egypt at his command. His brothers had come down to Egypt looking for food, not recognizing that Joseph was the one in charge. Joseph overheard them admit their guilt about not having compassion on him and selling him into slavery all those years ago, and now it seems he wanted to test the sincerity of their remorse.

Now Joseph was recreating a situation in which his older brothers would see their younger brother sold into slavery, and he would be able to observe how they might react. Because Judah was willing to give his life to free Benjamin from slavery (opposite of what he did to Joseph 22 years earlier), Joseph could see that their hearts were changed and that they were ready to show compassion on Benjamin, so Joseph could show compassion on them.

Becoming a Slave

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Judah was willing to trade his own life as head of a large clan for a life of slavery, just to save his littlest brother from the same fate. This was a huge step that showed the change in Judah. It was Judah who had come up with a plan to sell his brother Joseph into slavery. Now it was Judah who offered to become a slave himself so that his brother Benjamin could go free.

We all have an innate desire for freedom, yet there is a difference between the freedom to do whatever we feel like without any interference from others, and the freedom to love others from our heart. Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but **whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave**—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).

If we choose to follow the worldly freedom of doing whatever we feel like, we may for a time be able to bend others to our will and get them to serve us. But we will not be able to master ourselves, and our own selfish desires and appetites will gradually take hold of us. As slaves of our own lusts and addictions we will lose control of our fate and our relationships. On the other hand, we can recognize that we are created not to serve ourselves but to serve others, and we volunteer to be the Lord's slaves. "Thy will be done," we say, "not mine." When we make the Lord our master, He gives us the power to master ourselves. We can take control of our emotions and desires, rein them in and turn them away from the cliffs and swamps onto the path of integrity.

"To make this matter clearer let me say that within all compulsion towards what is good a certain freedom exists, which is not recognized as freedom while a person is exercising self-compulsion, but is nevertheless inwardly present. Take for example one who is willing to risk death for the sake of some particular end, or one who is willing to endure physical pain for the sake of his health. There is a willingness and so a certain freedom in those actions, though while the person is taking risks or suffering pain these remove any feeling of willingness or freedom. So also with those who compel themselves to do what is good. Present within them there is a willingness and thus freedom, which is the

source of and the reason for their self-compulsion. That is to say, they compel themselves for the reason that they may obey the things which the Lord has commanded and that their souls may become saved after death; and within these a still greater reason is present, though the person himself is not aware of it, namely the Lord's kingdom, and indeed the Lord Himself." (Secrets of Heaven 1937.4)

When Judah promised to take responsibility for Benjamin, he did not expect that it would result in slavery. Later, when Joseph claimed Benjamin as his slave, Judah felt compelled by his conscience to give up his own freedom to set Benjamin free. That is what compassion ultimately requires of all of us. When we see others suffering, we compel ourselves to do the compassionate thing. for "to be compelled by love and by the fear of losing it is to compel oneself" (*Divine Providence* 136).

It seemed to Joseph's brothers a terrible thing that Benjamin would become a slave to the powerful man they did not recognize as Joseph. Yet from Joseph's point of view, it would be a good thing, because Benjamin would not actually have been a slave but a much loved brother, living in peace and freedom with Joseph. As it turned out, Judah volunteered to take Benjamin's place as a slave, only to find that he did not become a slave but was restored as a brother in good standing with Joseph. So it is in our spiritual life. It may at times require us to compel ourselves against our own will to what the Lord wants. It may feel like slavery, but in the end it brings us freedom and close connection with the Lord and others.

Benjamin: Truth from Love

We already saw in last week's story that Benjamin is a symbol of truth from love, or the new perspective on truth that we get when we see things from the point of view of loving the Lord and other people. This perspective is what brings people together. It allows people who are each arguing from their own point of view to reconcile with each other.

There is a saying that "To understand all is to forgive all" (Germaine de Staël). I don't think it is true that trying to make people understand us will necessarily make them forgive us. Nor will simply understanding someone else's motivation and experience necessarily cause us to feel compassion for them, but often mutual understanding us the piece that is missing from our efforts to make peace with each other. Moreover, to completely understand someone else, we must be willing to set aside the selfishness which distorts our view of others.

Often in the beginning of our spiritual life we grasp spiritual truths and principles that we sometimes apply rigidly or harshly because we are more focused on being right than on being kind. There is not a lot of room in our hearts for love and compassion because we are more focused on getting credit for following the rules, or believing the true doctrines. That kind of focus on truth without love is represented by the brothers when they rejected Joseph. The process of reconciling those brothers with Joseph represents bringing the truths we know back into harmony with love for others. Only Benjamin, the truth from love, can do this. Benjamin connects with both sides. He is with the ten brothers, but is Joseph's full brother.

I find it interesting that Benjamin has a central role in this story, and yet he says nothing. Benjamin is the one who brings the conflicted brothers together, yet he does is just by being present and by listening. I wonder if that is because truth from love is something we find more by listening than by talking. It is when we truly have compassion on others and are able to see

things from their point of view that we are able to see truth in a new light--the light of love. It is the same truth that we learn from doctrine and rules, yet it is truth that is not brash, harsh or outspoken, but the simple, innocent, quiet awareness that God is here and He loves us and can help us love each other, if we are just willing to do things His way, with compassion. Only Benjamin could bring the brothers together, and only way to reconcile our heads with our hearts is by looking at truth from love, seeing truth from our neighbor's point of view, the truth born of a deep desire to truly understand and nurtured by compassion, a calm presence and a listening heart.

Your task for this week is to have compassion. Be present with and listen to those you love, and especially pay attention to what they are feeling. Seek understand before being understood. Listen with all your heart. Experience the joy or sorrow of another as if it were your own joy or sorrow. Be willing to set aside your selfish interests and seek to truly serve others, especially by taking the time to just be present and listen.

Additional Reading: *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47, *Divine Providence* 337.