



## COMPASSION FOR THE ABANDONED

Compassion is a feeling you have when you recognise the sufferings of others, and this feeling gives rise to a desire to take action. Compassion is the language of the heart and an expression of love for a brother or sister in need.

The New Oxford American Dictionary defines compassion as "a sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others." The Merriam-Webster Dictionary says it is the "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." The Cambridge dictionary defines it as "a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them." The three dictionaries stress the words "sympathy or sympathetic." One feels sympathy and then has a desire to reach out.

Bl. Mary Theresa felt this when she heard for the first time about the miseries of African people through the words of Cardinal Lavigerie. This compassion grew in Mary Theresa when she met two Franciscan Sisters who visited the Court seeking donations for, and talking animatedly about, their missionary work among the lepers in Madagascar. She wanted to reach out, to help, but had doubts. She turned to her uncle, Cardinal Ledóchowski. His words chased away all doubts and convinced her to use her pen and artistic talents to support and make known the needs of missionaries working in Africa.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is an excellent example of "compassion." Mother Foundress's wonderful reflection on it is enclosed for your reflection and meditation. This parable shows us also another important aspect: "breaking boundaries" - going out of our comfort zone to help someone else who is in difficulty. It is effortless to "think compassion" and not "act compassion". This can happen in our convents and communities. Are we able to give a helping hand without waiting to be recompensated or exchange favours?

Shall we ask ourselves to which of the four characters in this parable we are more similar? The priest and the Levi are important people in their society. Could their attitude be justified? Pope Francis in his encyclical letter 'Fratelli Tutti' said that "*The nervous indifference that makes them pass to the other side of the road – whether innocently or not, whether the result of disdain or mere distraction – makes the priest and the Levite a sad reflection of the growing gulf between ourselves and the world around us. There are many ways to pass by at a safe distance: we can retreat inwards, ignore others, or be indifferent to their plight. Or we can look elsewhere, as in some countries, or certain sectors of them, where contempt is shown for the poor and their culture, and one looks the other way as if a development plan imported from without could edge them out. This is how some justify their indifference: the poor, whose pleas for help might touch their hearts, do not exist.*"

The Samaritan, a businessman? Or just a simple person going about his business? Pope Francis praised the attitude of this man, saying, "*only one person stopped, approached the man and cared for him, even spending his own money to provide for his needs. He also gave him something that in our frenetic world we cling to tightly: he gave him his time. Certainly, he had his plans for that day, his own needs,*

*commitments, and desires. Yet, he was able to put all that aside when confronted with someone in need. Without even knowing the injured man, he saw him as deserving of his time and attention”.*

The “victim” has been robbed and beaten almost to death? Indeed at times, we feel like this unfortunate man. Pope Francis again associates the situation of this man to ours, saying, *“there are times when we feel like him, badly hurt and left on the side of the road. We can also feel helpless because our institutions are neglected and lack resources, or serve the interests of a few, without and within”*. We are responsible for the sufferings of all. We, daughters of Mary Theresa, should first and foremost be at the front line giving a helping hand where needed by our prayers, almsgiving, and personal sacrifices.

From Mother Foundress to us today, we try to act with compassion towards all, especially in Africa. Many of us have been working in the administrations, answering letters, and sending appeals to consolidate help for missionaries. Those of us who do animation first hand have direct contact with people through mission appeals and distributing *Echo*. Have you ever asked yourself why you drive three, four, or more hours to a church only to find a few people present for Mass where you were supposed to speak about the missions? You are tired, you have had a heavy week, but you have to go for animation?

It’s the little voice inside “compassion”! Because it is not for you but for the needy, the neediest of society, that you go out for animation. You want to carry a little of the burden of those who are hungry, those without education, and of those who only have the bare minimum to live on each day. (“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ” Galatians 6:2).

Our compassion is shown through many missionaries.

“I will tell of the kindness of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us — yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindness.” Isaiah 63:7. Mother Foundress knew how to show God’s compassion in her time. She spent her whole life for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, serving the missions without reservation.

Mother Foundress sensitised all who were present at her conferences to feel that compassion for the people of Africa and for missionaries. She invited the members of the Union of Catholic Mothers to make known the work of the Sodality and suggested that, if they wanted to do more, they subscribe to the *Echo*. When speaking to the Children of Mary, the students of the 'English Ladies', to French adolescents, and many others, Maria Therese instilled in them love and compassion for their brothers and sisters in Africa. As she said, *“to participate seriously in a missionary work, it is not enough to have a natural compassion, it [must be] stirred by faith”*(Conf. to Union of Catholic Mothers, Breslavia). Her compassion had taken fire, and she wanted others to feel the heat of it.

Reading through the writings of Mother Foundress, the word “compassion” does not appear, but one feels that whatever she said and did, was full of compassion and that she wanted to arouse others to compassion for the needy Africans.

They say, “charity begins at home.” It is true when we live a community life that is unity, peace, and sisterhood twenty-four/seven. The abandoned can be my sister who feels lonely, is withdrawn or not at ease with herself. We all have experienced times when someone came to our help just at the right moment, when we realised that by ourselves we could not carry on and could not succeed. Shall we learn to act ‘compassion’, be ‘compassion’ and breathe ‘compassion’ wherever we are? In whatever situation we find ourselves in the future? May Blessed Mother Foundress help us in this endeavour so that our compassion may have a new name, i.e, “a Claverian Compassion”.

**Here are some verses from the Bible for our reflection and meditation.**

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:8-9.

"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." 1 John 3:18.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." Peter 4:10.

"I will tell of the kindness of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord has done for us, yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindness." Isaiah 63:7.

"But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." Psalm 86:15.

"The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion." Psalm 116:5.

"The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." Psalm 145:8-9.

"Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!' The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!' Jesus stopped and called them. 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked. 'Lord,' they answered, 'we want our sight.' Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him." Matthew 20:30-34.

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things." Mark 6:34.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:32.

"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble." 1 Peter 3:8.

"Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind." Philippians 2:1-2.

\*\*\*\*\*

***In the light of these verses, how is my 'compassion' towards others, towards my sisters?***

Do I 'speak' compassion and 'act' compassion?

Do I allow others to be compassionate toward me in my time of difficulties?

What shall I do to help others to have compassion for a needy person - to help them not to 'pass by'?

Rome, 20 October 2021

*Sr. Jacinta Chan Wong*