



INTERCESSORS' QUARTERLY LETTER

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"Compassion.." Openness and Charity!

Isn't compassion such a complicated word to define? If we were asked the question, what does compassion mean for you? We would have to stop and think a bit about it. And yet, for us Intercessors, it is at the heart of our commitment.

Compassion, from the Latin "I suffer with," is a virtue through which with a person is born to perceive or feel another person's suffering, and is moved to do something about it, to fix it. There is often confusion between the feeling of pity and the virtue of compassion.

For us Christians, compassion finds its source in Jesus' attitude, "*But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*" (Mt 9:36)

It is truly a virtue with which we, as Intercessors, are called to perceive or feel the suffering of others and that makes us participate, in our hearts and through our prayer, in what they experience and feel... Jesus "*was moved with compassion for them and healed their sick.*" (Mt 14:13-14)

Compassion evokes a feeling of human fraternity, that incites us to carry out acts of charity and communion. We are thus called to assist our neighbour by opening our heart to the difficulties they are experiencing. We act through compassion, by accomplishing every kind of sharing.

Compassion invites us to use all the necessary means with the aim of helping or delivering the person who is suffering, including when it is someone who is not particularly close to us, like in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. A stranger becomes involved and saves the man on the ground, who had been attacked, while others had passed by without stopping.

As Intercessors, we are the Good Samaritans through the prayers we address to the Lord for those who await and expect our compassion.

Gérard & Marie Christine de Roberty

SPIRITUAL LETTER

THE COMPASSION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

After the Feast of the Cross on September 14th, on the following day, we remember Mary's Compassion. If the official title of this feast day is Our Lady of Sorrows, the title Our Lady of Compassion is also very old and very evocative. Mary is not unaware of what the Son of God experienced on the Cross. She, "one who believed," is in communion with what her son experienced. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit who accompanies her step by step, Mary stands at the foot of the cross and, through her love of God and for mankind, she is united with Jesus' sacrifice for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. Meaning what? When Jesus gives her John as her son, he makes her the mother of all those who will be born to a new life through his death and resurrection. He makes her the Mother of the Church, the mother of all living things.

Compassion enables us to live according to God's grace and according to the consent of our faith, in the very wake of Mary, which also means being "a mother" for others, a mother whose only desire is to give life to others, a life that comes from God, a life that transfigures all pain, all sickness and also, all joy! Compassion means that we want to give ourselves, give what is in us: God's life, the source of all light. St Francis of Assisi used to tell his brothers, "*Be mothers to each other.*" He most certainly said that so that there would be even more gentleness, attention and tenderness, but above all, Francis used to say that so that everything in us would be a source of fruitfulness, so that our brothers and sisters can pass from death to life. The fecundity of Mary, the fecundity of the Church, our fecundity too.

As Intercessors close to God, our compassion, carried by our communion with the suffering of others, has but one goal: that both we and them together may partake in the Lord's resurrection.

**Paul-Dominique Marcovits, o.p.
Spiritual Counsellor for the Intercessors**

SOME IDEAS AS TO WHAT COMPASSION IS

Compassion means "to suffer with." Compassion is not an emotion. It is more like an attitude that enables us to be sensitive to other people's suffering. When faced with other people's suffering, we experience different emotions. It can be sorrow, anger, revolt etc..., all of them are caused by what we observe in the person who suffers.

Compassion needs to be differentiated from identification. In identification, we put ourselves more or less clearly, more or less voluntarily in the other person's place and we react as if we were them. For example, a colleague has just received threats (as happened to me in the past). I react strongly and tell them how I would react in their place. It is obvious that I have linked the two situations and that my reactions are related to my own experience. My colleague's situation was the trigger for my own personal experience.

Identification is also different to compassion because it bears on different subjects, both positive and negative, while compassion only exists in relation to suffering. I can identify with my daughter who has difficulties in her relationships with her friends, as I can with my son who lives only for sports.

Compassion must also be differentiated from empathy. Empathy is an attitude that enables you to seize and understand what the person is experiencing emotionally, as they experience it. It is in some ways the capacity to put yourself in the other person's shoes to understand things 'from the inside.'

When we are empathetic, we deliberately choose to try and see and understand the situation like the other person; we deliberately adopt their point of view, including the emotional reactions that are part of it. But we always remain aware that it is the other person's experience (which is not the case with identification). Contrary to what happens with compassion, with empathy, we are not necessarily moved (even though we could be).

In order to be able to be compassionate, you need to know have empathy, for it is only when we grasp what the other person is experiencing can we be led to be moved. If we have no idea or representation of what it is like, we will find it impossible to be moved.

COMPASSION AND ITS CHRISTIAN MEANING

What motivates us to do charitable works is "compassion." Jesus was moved with compassion. On several occasions, the Bible says so. *"Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have not continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat...' The disciples said to Him, 'Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?' Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves do you have?' And they said, 'Seven, and a few little fish.'..."* (Mt 15, 32-34) And so it was with only seven loaves and a few fish that the disciples fed the great multitude... And in the end, there were even seven large baskets full of the fragments left over!

These loaves and fish can represent our oftentimes very limited gifts. God has the ability to multiply them in order to help people around us. If you are involved in a food bank, if you teach Sunday school or if you are in charge of praise and thanksgiving and you feel like these disciples with their loaves and few fish, feel encouraged today! If God has called you for works that are already in motion, he will also multiply your loaves and fish so that you will be highly effective in nourishing the hungry multitude.

Nonetheless, you know what unsettles me the most when I read this passage? It is to see the Son of God moved with compassion. He is moved with compassion because he sees before him a hungry multitude.

What do we feel when faced with a society that is spiritually hungry? Are we moved to compassion? Anxiety is the sickness of our century. Our old people die alone. Let us not remain inactive before so much suffering. It is this compassion that will push us into action!

Martin Luther King once said, *"Everyone can be great, because anybody can serve. You do not have to have a college degree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love..."*

Stéphanie Reader Poirier, www.topchretien.com

COMPASSION AND INTERIOR PRAYER

My dear friend, I would like that when you go to pray, you always have the strong conviction of being expected: expected by the Father, by the Son and by the Holy Spirit, expected by the Trinitarian family. That your place is ready: remember, in effect, what Christ said, *"I am going to prepare you a place."* You might object saying that he was referring to heaven. It is true. But interior prayer is heaven precisely, at least in its essential reality: God's presence, God's love, God's welcoming of his child.

The Lord always awaits and expects us.

Even better: we have just started to make a few steps towards him, and he already comes to meet us. Remember the parable, *"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."* And yet, as you will remember, the son had seriously offended his father and nonetheless he was expected, eagerly.

**Henri Caffarel, Cahiers sur l'Oraison (Booklets on Interior Prayer)
Initiation Series 1, October 1966**

COMPASSION AND TENDERNESS

We have grown old without realising it. We have aches and weaknesses. Sometimes we are afraid. We are afraid of illness, we are afraid of potential solitude, we are afraid of death. We become demanding with our spouse, too demanding even. And yet, we understand each other deeply, we love each other more, we cannot live without each other. How are we to live this stage of our lives that involves many renunciations?

There is a type of compassion that is not a paternalistic or resigned attitude, but a fraternal feeling that means we are on the same level, the same wavelength as the other person. Compassion means suffering with. It implies caring for the other person with tenderness and sometimes a bit of humour. It also means asking with great simplicity for the other person's care, letting yourself be accompanied, consoled, helped. Both of us, together we need to turn towards the Lord and ask him for his Spirit in a simple and constant prayer at this stage at the end of our lives.

This time, before the other person leaves definitively, also represents a special moment when we can tell each other again with tenderness how much we love each other, when we can kiss, touch, caress each other... Possibly, weakness brings us to a greater knowledge of ourselves that we can share with the other person, without cheating, without hiding anything, and always seeking a bit more truth, a bit more love, a bit more hope.

**L'amour conjugal, chemin vers Dieu, Equipes Notre Dame,
(Conjugal Love, a Path towards God, Teams of Our Lady),
Novembre (November) 2017**

HENRI CAFFAREL, IS JOY A SIN?

Ah...! Whoever decided one day to open themselves up to Christ's love, and through him to the suffering of mankind, gave up their tranquillity: compassion is a consuming passion in one's heart.

A consuming passion that incites one to act. On God, first of all. Whether one is in the metro, on the street or in the workshop, one wants to be the "permanent person in prayer and offering." The pain of mankind that inhabits one is what one presents to God. This joy of Christ's that sings in one's deepest depths, one ceaselessly asks that God give it to all one's brothers. Lawyer of the poor before the Lord, one also expects to help them: the idea of wishing them joy and not sharing one's bread with them is totally impossible. The widow who has to work to feed her three children, but who is haunted by the misery of the world, understood this very well. A few days ago, she gave me 250000 (old French) francs saying, "*I couldn't resist, so I sold my engagement ring. Use this money to help a family who is needy and destitute.*" Helping the poor is good. But the whole duty of a Christian does not reside there. A civilisation is crumbling (maybe precisely because it built upon the tranquillity of some and the poverty of others). New structures are being developed. Today's Christian must build a more just world. Pretending to suffer because of poverty in the world and not become involved in the reform of this world, how incoherent!

Therefore, a Christian's heart—and I am talking about a true disciple of Christ—is heavy with the immense suffering of humanity (and also the enormous sin of the world: but that's another topic). A concern is burning him up, it is true—St Paul's one, "*Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*" But mankind's distress within him does not evince God's Joy. It is this Joy that in contrast makes him understand their distress; it is Joy, and not the sterile anxiety that is bragged about, that always relaunches it to help all misery. And if so many Christians today are still scandalously "tranquil," their lack of anxiety must not be rebuked, but rather the fact that they do not possess this Joy of Christ, that finds its source in the union with Christ.

HENRI CAFFAREL, THE COMPASSION OF THE PRODIGAL SON'S FATHER

"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him." We understand from this that the father, for months already, used to go, every day, to the turn in the road, from where he could see the valley spread out and he could scan the horizon, forever in hope of glimpsing a little silhouette far off. And every day, at nightfall, he returns home.

Christ gives us the example of this Father, who every day, scours the horizon, hoping to see the child return, the stray child, in order to talk to us about God, the all-powerful.

"But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him."

Another person would not have recognised this little silhouette on the horizon. But someone said: love is the art of sensing, predicting. Immediately and with no hesitation, the Father says, 'That there, that is my son. That little silhouette tottering on the horizon, tottering not because he drank too much, poor boy, but because he is tired with exhaustion, is my son.'

"And he had compassion."

What is compassion? I did not find the best definition of compassion in my dictionary, but in a letter from Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, who had bronchitis. *“(Ma fille, j’ai mal à votre poitrine.) My daughter, your chest pains me.”* That is compassion. I am pained by the other person’s pain. And the Father is pained by his son’s pain, and Christ wants us to understand that God all-mighty, the Father of Mercy, is pained by the pain of his child, the sinner. Because the sinner is primarily a wounded person in God’s eyes. They are a child who has hurt themselves and that is unbearable to Him. He is pained by his child’s pain.

“And he had compassion.”

**Commentary on the Gospel of the Prodigal Son,
Editorial in the Letter of Teams of Our Lady**

GENERAL PRAYER INTENTION

With our service of intercession through prayer, we have received an urgent call to live in complete compassion with our brothers who are touched by suffering, sickness, harrowing situations.

May Jesus help us through his Gospel to experience true compassion regarding these brothers: Compassion, a sign of God’s love for those who suffer and a sign of our own love for those who are entrusted to us in prayer.

May the Holy Spirit help humanity and ourselves to rediscover the meaning of God’s love in each one of us and that this call be the occasion for tenderness, sharing, peace and compassion.

May the Virgin Mary, Virgin of all compassion, enlighten us on this path to holiness that leads us through her Son and the Spirit, towards the Father of all mercy.

We beseech you, Lord!

SHARING IN THE INTERCESSORS’ LIFE

We thank those who are able for the help that they can bring with their financial contribution to the development of the Intercessors. By donating, you help us distribute the Letter, print up posters, finance documental material for countries who cannot afford it...Donations are to be made out to END Intercessors and sent to the address below.

THANK YOU!