

Commentary to the 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Compassion of the Lord



Many years ago I was a part time chaplain at a Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. Some of the children I visited were terminally ill, usually with some form of cancer. I will admit, to my shame, that at first I found it difficult to visit these children. But after a few weeks, I stopped seeing their sickness and started seeing the precious boys and girls that they were.

One day, I went into a teenager's room, a wonderful boy named Jamie Kelleher, and found a very excited young man. It seems that while he was sleeping, Willie Stargell came into his room and left him a note of encouragement. Willie Stargell was one of the most loved baseball player on the Pittsburg Pirates and in the entire major leagues at that time. That was all Jamie would talk about for the next number of days. It took his mind off his problems. I remember looking in the paper to see if there was anything about Willie Stargell visiting the hospital or even being in Columbus, but I couldn't find anything. Evidently, Mr. Stargell happened to be passing through but took some time out of his schedule for these seriously ill children. I checked with the nurses, and they told me that Stargell and a few other ball players saw the hospital from the highway and decided to see the kids. Willie Stargell was a great man. His greatness is remembered in Pittsburgh, in Cooperstown and at Children's Hospital in Columbus.

All the gospels emphasize the greatness of the Lord. The Gospel of Mark presents people pushing against Jesus, crowding Him, trying just to touch him. The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the Eternal Word existing for all time but becoming flesh in our time. The Gospel of Luke emphasizes Jesus' greatness in a different way. In Luke, Jesus manifests His greatness in His compassion. We have an example of this in today's Gospel reading. Jesus comes upon a widow following her son's funeral litter. He feels deeply for her. Her sorrow becomes His sorrow. He gives the son back to the mother. Like Elijah in the first reading, He conquers death. Like Elijah, He shows His greatness in His compassion.

The Gospel of Luke is the Gospel of the Compassionate Lord. The message is clear: the Lord cares for each of us as individuals. He is not too big for us, or too great for us. In fact, He shows His greatness in the concern He has for each of us.

And He calls us to follow. To be as He is. In the Gospel of Matthew, we come upon the order "Be perfect as my heavenly father is perfect." In the Gospel of Luke the same directive is rephrased to: "Be compassionate as my heavenly father is compassionate."

It is impossible for us to be too caring, too giving, or too concerned about others. It's just difficult. We have busy schedules. We can't handle additional emotional grief. We find excuses why we can't spend time with a family with a sick child, or with the elderly lady down the block. Many times people have said to me, "My child came down with cancer, and all my friends became strangers." We were surrounded with help at first, but as the weeks became months and he became sicker and sicker, many people seemed to disappear. Perhaps that's because it hurts to expose ourselves to another's grief. But this hurt can bring support, this hurt can bring healing. Sure, we are busy. Jesus was busy too. But He didn't look for excuses to stop everything and reach out to the hurting. His heart went out to those in need. He was compassionate.

His heart goes out to us too. He cares about every one of us. And He calls us to be like him, to be compassionate. You remember what He said after He washed His disciples feet before the Last Supper: "What you have seen me do, you must do." We have to allow the compassion of the Lord to flow through us to others.

This takes courage. This takes love, His Love.

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