

Compassion

Compassion is a word that we have heard throughout our lives but today, during the pandemic, we are seeing and hearing about acts of kindness and compassion everywhere. People who are helping the elderly by getting groceries, staying in touch by phone or zoom, bringing books and holding them in prayer. Drive-byes in cars and sometimes fire trucks by friends and supporters to help make up for lost celebrations. People supporting local businesses by getting extra take-out and leaving extra tips for waitresses. People sharing limited supplies. Libraries giving away free book and children's' activities. The list is long and wonderful.

We also have the compassion of the health care workers. Nurses giving their phones to dying patients so they can say good-bye to their families. Treating the frightened and lonely like their own families.

Then there are meals and treats being donated to the overworked hospital workers.

Entire countries making noise each evening to thank the workers from windows and balconies.

People serenading them outside the hospitals.

Sewers making and donating thousands of masks to keep others safe.

So many acts of gratitude and compassion. During this time of fear and need and trial, the best in human nature seems to be blossoming in many ways.

Now compassion was a central theme in Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus' message to us was simple. Love God and love people. Love people. And Jesus taught us how to follow his compassionate example.

This morning's gospel is one of the most famous of the miracles that Jesus performed: the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. This miracle is so important that it is found in all four of the gospels.

Jesus finds himself with a huge crowd of people. He has just heard about the death of John the Baptist and has gone away to be alone but the crowd has found out where he is and has come to hear him and have him heal the sick. It is getting late and the disciples want to send the people away to find food for themselves.

But Jesus tells the disciples to feed them. They respond that they have very little food. Jesus asks them to bring him what food there is, blesses it and asks the disciples to distribute it. And it feeds over 5,000 men plus uncounted women and children. And when they are done there is still much left over.

Let's reflect on what happened here. Jesus refused to turn people away even though it seemed they would not be able to nourish themselves. He told the apostles to bring what they had. The apostles were sure it was not enough but obeyed. He blessed it and told them to distribute it. They obeyed. And all were fed with much left over.

So what are the lessons here.

How often do we go to God not believing there is enough: love, care, money, whatever we feel is missing in our lives? But Jesus asks us to bring whatever we have. Jesus can bless us and give us what we need to survive. He can take whatever we have to offer, however small and seemingly inadequate and make so much more of it through grace and blessing. Not only can we have enough for ourselves. We have enough to give to others.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes is one of many miracles Jesus performed.

We remember the miracles of healing the blind, leprosy, paralysis and other afflictions. We remember the driving out of evil spirits from the possessed. We remember Jesus' raising of Lazarus and others and we remember Jesus calming the seas and walking on water.

We know from these events that Jesus had the power to do what he felt was important for those around him. We know that he cared for the people who were his followers and others in need. We know that he wants us to follow him in these footsteps.

Jesus did not use his power to establish a worldly kingdom. He never made his followers rich. He asked for compassion not success in the world's jaded eyes. But acts of love that matter in God's eyes.

Jesus wants us to be compassionate in whatever ways we can. No matter how seemingly little we can offer. If we bring it, it will be enough. If we bring it, it will

be more than we can imagine. People's lives have been changed by the smallest acts of compassion. We can give love and hope when we give kindness.

We are called to be the disciples of Christ in this very challenging world. We do not need to be rich or powerful or famous to be compassionate. If we give compassion in the name of Jesus, we will be rich in grace, powerful in Christian love and known to the only one who really matters, Jesus.

These times are trying. They may get even more so. Do not let these days go by without being intentional about acts of compassion. Think about what you can bring to Jesus to be blessed and then share it with others. It is what he taught us to do.