Weavers of compassion and reconciliation in global solidarity

“To act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God.” (Micah 6:8)

“*My soul was moved with compassion, for God knows how dear you are to us; the four of you have fought the good fight, and remained faithful in the fire of tribulation.*”¹

Thus wrote Sr. Mary Euphrasia, in October 1827 from Tours to the Superior of Valence, the day after M. Berger, a priest from Valence had visited the monasteries of Our Lady of Charity. The priest described in detail the condition of the house and how overwhelmed with work, were the Sisters. So we continue with our reflection on the theme of our Congregational Chapter. St. Mary Euphrasia has two conferences on our apostolate where she talks about compassion in so many words. *The more our penitents are spiritually sick, the more interest we should take in them; and the more they tend to fall, the more compassion must we have for them.*² In another Letter, she says: “*My own heart is moved with compassion at the thought of all that you have endured; oh yes, my daughter, as you say, it is a bitter sacrifice, you are our cherished Xaviers.*”³

How are we to begin to know more about COMPASSION?

Any dictionary could easily give you a definition of compassion. They uniformly read that the word comes from the Latin stem “com” = together, with, and “pator” = to suffer, to feel. There are two keys here: interconnectedness, and that of emotion and action. Compassion always includes and contemplates the other. It is a quality that brings people together. It is in effect “divine respect”.

We see in the word compassion the ability for a person to feel what the other person is feeling (sometimes considered empathy or even sympathy). Yet more so, we see in the word compassion the ability for a person to fully feel the emotional grief and suffering of another with them in the present moment. This is a key and vital definition of compassion that distinguishes it from many other words. It starts as a feeling that moves into action to help and alleviate the burden of suffering, pain or guilt. *(Please see the supporting document for detailed definitions and references....)*

Sacred Scriptures add a deeper dimension to the meaning of compassion. In the Old Testament, it was a quality which was attributed to God.

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¹ Letter 8, vol. I, p. 21
² Conférences, Ch. 59, p. 430, édition 1992
³ Lettre 55, vol. 1, p. 130
Exodus 33:19
And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

2 Kings 13:23
But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence.

2 Chronicles 30:9
“For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him.”

In the New Testament, it is a quality of Jesus Himself, but there is added, another dimension of healing to make the presence of God felt in their midst.

Matthew 15:32
Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

Mark 1:41
Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

Luke 7:13
When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”

The three citations from the New Testament show us how Jesus Himself manifested compassion. In Matthew, his feeling of compassion moved Him to the multiplication of loaves where He fed five thousand, not counting women and children. In Mark, it was a leper who cried out to Him asking to be healed. Contrary to all conventions of the time, He actually touched Him to heal him. That of Luke is the widow of Naim, whom Jesus and his disciples met at the town’s gate, who was leading the funeral of her only son.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, has several references which speaks of Christ’s compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity as a resplendent sign that “God has visited his people” and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body. His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.

(Please see the supporting document for detailed citations....)

4 Luke 7:16
Pope John Paul II has two encyclicals on the specific topic of compassion. In Chapter VIII of *Redemptoris Missio*, on the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate, he speaks about missionary spirituality. “The missionary is urged on by “zeal for souls,” zeal inspired by Christ’s own charity, which takes the form of concern, tenderness, compassion, openness, availability and interest in people’s problems. Jesus’ love is very deep: he who “knew what was in man” (Jn 2:25) loved everyone by offering them redemption and suffered when it was rejected.”

Pope John Paul II in his encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia*, links mercy and compassion. In Chapter 3 he has a lengthy definition of mercy hand in hand with compassion and moves in Chapter 4 to a reflection on the parable of the Prodigal Son as a practical example of how to practice mercy and compassion.

Do we recall these practical acts of compassion enshrined in our congregational history?

- ♥ Most of the biographers of St. John Eudes mention about the pestilence in Caen sometime in 1626, where he chose to live in a cask on the meadows of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity so that he could minister to the victims of the plague and not contaminate his confreres. Madame de Budos superior of the Abbey regularly sent him his nourishment while living in that cask/barrel.
- ♥ Rose Virginie while still a boarder at Madame Chobelet’s Christian Association learned from Mademoiselle Pauline de Lignac about the bad mood among some of the boarders during one Whitsuntide. She was moved to volunteer with two other girls to preach to the boarders. The sermons had such success that, the elder girls celebrated the feast as if it were the complement of their confirmation.
- ♥ Sr. Mary Euphrasia was the Superior in Angers, when one day the Sister in charge of the kitchen came to her quite upset about the girls having gathered the apples which she had eyed for the meals. She told the Sister to reserve two or three trees for the girls and keep the rest for the meal preparations.
- ♥ As Superior General she recalled Sr. Mary of St. Teresa SCHORLEMER from Bangalore, India to prepare for the new mission in New Orleans, USA. Before sending her to the New World, she allowed Sr. Teresa to visit her family in Germany.

FOR YOU: These are just a few examples on practical applications of COMPASSION from our Congregational history. Surely you have many more similar expressions in your Province, Community or even personal history. Do you want to share these with us so we could transmit to the Good Shepherd family around the world?

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