

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 4th June Living Pentecost

If people were asked, after reading through the gospels, to find one word for the kind of person Jesus was, many would choose compassionate. His compassionate heart seemed to inform his life. 'And Jesus, seeing the crowds, was moved with compassion.' Matt9:36

This profound adjective has depth of meaning, combining the finest elements of caring, of self service, of sensitive attention, and of true openness, humility and self discipline. It is about the grace of love, stripped to its radical essential. It is about self-giving purified of selfinterest. Compassion springs from an awareness of the connectedness of every aspect of creation and life. It has to do with a sense of identity with all forms of existence. It has deep roots in the heart of the Creator.

When God becomes visible, tangible and available on this earth the result is incarnate compassion. We look to Jesus to see the face of God. The Word, a self portrait by the Creator, is drawn with the lines of compassion. Throughout the gospels, even when the word itself is not used, we can feel the movement of this instinctive gut reaction. In Greek the movement of compassion means a deep-seated impulse that comes from the very bowels of the human being. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, 'Don't be afraid', 'Don't be worried', 'Don't cry', and Mark points out that he was more moved at the last penny of the poor widow freely given into the temple treasury than by the grandeur of the temple itself; and that while everyone else was so excited about the raising of Jairus' daughter, Jesus was more concerned that she should be given something to eat. . .

Pope Francis reminds us that compassion is no soft option. Throughout his writings, particularly in 'Misericordiae Vultus' (2016), he sees it as It is an intensely felt way of dying. It destroys suffering only by suffering with and on behalf of those who suffer. A Buddhist prayer is to use suffering so as to end suffering. A sympathy with the poor that would be unwilling to share their sufferings would be a useless emotion. One cannot share the blessings of the victims of our own humanity (the anawim) unless one is willing to enter into their painful plight. And that is what Christians are called to do. Jesus pleaded with his followers to "be compassionate as your father is compassionate". This calls for the most sublime graces of trusting in, and letting go into, the ever-present, all-pervasive loving providence of our tremendous lover. . .

God's compassion becomes a little more understandable, then, when we realise that all creation, and every aspect of it, is the fruit of God's will. God sees the divine Self in everyone and everything. Only when we, too, see and know and feel the oneness of our universal sisterhood and brotherhood, can we "suffer with" in an authentic and saving way. Only when we feel an intimacy with the elements of nature, with the turning of the seasons, with the pulse of the earth, can we passionately desire what Aquinas calls 'the common good'. These are also the themes of Pope Francis in his encyclical 'Laudato Si'(2015).

Compassion moves outwards. It will not be trapped into individual social saving. It grows only when given away and it can only happen in community. It is a 'reaching out' kind of virtue that is for ever purified in the sharing. And it enriches the giver, because there is a sense in which our redeeming compassion is directed towards ourselves. We are a part of everything and everything is a part of us. This is another glimpse of the amazing revelation of incarnation. 'Blessed are the compassionate for they themselves shall attain compassion,' writes Matthew, and, in his commentary on Saint Matthew's Gospel, Aquinas comments, 'To be compassionate is to have a heart that suffers from the misfortune of others because we think of it as our own.' 'We become mercy' preached Pope Francis.

(Passion for the Possible: pages 213, 214, 215)