

Engaging

Read the Mercy reflection on Compassion and highlight the words, phrases or ideas that speak to you.

Read one or two of the following :

- Exodus 1:15-2:10
- Luke 10:25-37
- Luke 15:11-32

What do the scripture passages and the words of Catherine McAuley reveal to you about the nature of God's compassion?

Reflecting

Take a moment to make yourself comfortable and allow yourself to be still.

How have you experienced the compassion of God in your life? What did the compassion look like, feel like? What was the impact on you?

Visualise (remember) a time when you were "moved in the depths of your being". What was the situation? What effect did it have on those involved? What effect did it have on you?

Compassion does not always provide solutions but it does bring about healing.

Acting

Jesus calls us to action. He does not ask us to be bystanders, he challenges us to be compassionate with one another.

Starting in your own homes, school and communities, list the people or situations where compassion is needed. Develop a plan of simple steps that you can take to assist in one of these situations.

Growing

Jesus reaction to suffering was to be moved with compassion in the depth of his being. How does this relate to the claim that compassion is a decision not just a feeling? What do you think of this view?

The compassion of Jesus has shown that doing compassion is not without a cost. To what extent are you willing to 'pay the price' of becoming a more compassionate person?

What strategies could we use, what situations could we insert ourselves into, which might help us to grow into more compassionate people?



Mercy Education Values



COMPASSION



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Compassion



In her *Familiar Instructions*, Catherine McAuley speaks of “things that the poor prize more highly than gold.” She lists “the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows.” When Catherine penned these words, she was surely describing her own way of life. The gentle compassionate look came from a heart that was charged with the mercy of God.

The main Hebrew word for God’s compassion is derived from the word for womb. In other words, the God of Israel is a God of womb-compassion (Exod 33:19; 34:6). God’s womb-compassion is often placed in parallel with God’s steadfast love or loving-kindness (Ps 106:45), and the suffering of the people elicits the womb-compassion of their God (Isa 49:13). The people are assured that their womb-compassionate God will neither abandon them nor forget the covenant made with their ancestors (Deut 4:31).

Compassion is at the heart of the Exodus story. It impels Pharaoh’s daughter to collaborate with the Hebrew women in rescuing the infant Moses who is to become God’s designated agent of liberation (Exodus 1:15–2:10). Pharaoh’s daughter sees the basket among the reeds. She then sees the child and hears his cry. She “has compassion” on him. In other words, the daughter of the oppressor reflects the compassion of the God of Israel who hears the cry of the poor (Ps 34:6) and sets the captives free. The verb “to have compassion” used of this courageous woman has overtones of liberation as well as of compassion. Her compassionate seeing and hearing leads to life-giving action.

In the gospels, Jesus of Nazareth embodies the compassion of God. He has “compassion” on the crowds because they are “like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). The Greek verb “to have compassion” carries similar connotations to the “womb-compassion” of the Hebrew Scriptures in that it means to be moved in the depths of one’s being. Jesus is deeply moved at the sight of the people in disarray. His response is more than an emotional response. He is moved to action, first by teaching them “many things” and then by ensuring

that everyone has access to the food resources of the group. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus has compassion for them, cures their sick (Matt 14:14) and directs his disciples to “give them something to eat” (Matt 14:16). Luke’s Jesus is moved with compassion and consequently moved to action at the plight of a widow who is shattered by the death of her only son and under threat of a life of destitution (Luke 7:11–17).

Luke’s parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and the Lost Sons (Luke 15:11–32) are striking gospel stories of compassion. In the first of the two parables, a Samaritan shows extravagant compassion while priest and Levite fail to care for the injured stranger by the side of the road. In this story, the Samaritan’s animal is also an agent of compassion, as are the healing oil and wine. The second parable features a parent’s extravagant compassion for his two lost sons. The angry older son is as much in need of compassion as is the wasteful younger son. Both are embraced by the father’s compassion. To live Mercy is to face the world with the “gentle compassionate look” that leads to life-enhancing action.

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