

## SELF COMPASSION: THE KEY TO FORGIVENESS

As disciples of Jesus, we all need to share in God's mission for the salvation of the world. *No one can be saved alone; we can only be saved together-* Fratelli Tutti (FT) # 32. Lent is a journey towards Easter. It is a time not just for fasting, penance and sacrifice, but a time to open wide our hearts, to the extent of breaking it, even piercing it open, in order to love unconditionally. For this to become a reality, we need the help of the Holy Spirit to renew our own faith, draw extensively from the 'living waters' of hope, and receive with an open heart the compassionate love of God, who birthed us all from star dust, as sisters and brothers of one family-*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Love in concern and compassion for all, is the highest expression of our faith and hope-* Pope Francis' Lenten Message (LM).

We inherited this relatedness with all God's creatures at our baptism through the working of the Holy Spirit. The potential for conversion by piercing our heart open to love unconditionally was shown to us by Jesus at the cross. The Paschal Mystery of the Passion-Death and Resurrection of Jesus provides enough inspiration for our thoughts, words, deeds, attitudes and decisions, particularly during this Holy Season of Lent.



Fasting, prayer and almsgiving will certainly help us along the way. However, in order to open our heart to the grandeur of God, who created all creatures big and small, we need to accept all God's creatures as part of one big family and love them all with zeal and compassion. This alone can lead all of us to the fullness of life. Fasting and sacrifice as forms of self denial are good, but not good enough. In our present Millennial-Narcissistic-Generation, where many are absorbed with clicking selfies, a consumer-oriented media and a job-driven educational system, which fosters individualism and self-promotion, this culture-of-death has resulted in drilling the desire to excel in this highly competitive world, at all costs, by hook or by crook. The outcome of this dog-eat-dog mentality has given rise to soaring levels of stress and a sense of inadequacy, unable to meet the lofty standards of success. Depression, suicide and the constant need and urge to compare ourselves with others and succeed in the rat race, has almost become an epidemic, especially during the present pandemic.

Perhaps during this season of lent, we need to make the paradigm shift from self-esteem to self-compassion. We urgently need to be kind and non-judgmental to ourselves. We need to accept ourselves, exactly as we are-with all our strengths and limitations-imperfect human beings in a world of chaos and suffering. When we are able to accept ourselves gracefully and with tenderness, then we will also be able to connect more easily with other frail human beings who are also struggling on this planet. When this becomes a reality, it will help to engender a sense of solidarity. Genuine self-compassion will connect us with ourselves and will lead us to reach out to others in compassion and unconditional love.

When we are able to feel one with others, suffer with them, share solidarity with them, experience a sense of empathy and bonding with a desire to relieve their suffering, and even feel their pain in our flesh, then the 'other' becomes part of me, not separate from me. When this realization dawns, we understand the true meaning of compassion. Compassion knows no 'other'.



This illumination will make me realize that when I hurt another, I am hurting myself and when I love another I am in truth loving myself. This heightened consciousness will help me bridge the gap between the 'self' and the 'other'. It will make it easier for me to love and forgive my enemies. *It all starts from within*, as Muniba Mazari (a once broken woman) from Pakistan, says. *Having received forgiveness ourselves, we can offer it through our willingness to enter into attentive dialogue with others and give comfort to those experiencing sorrow and pain* (LM).

When my circle of compassion widens it will slowly include all God's creatures. When all are loved and cared for with compassion and tenderness, a counter-culture of interdependence, equality, inclusivity and concern for the least and the lost will slowly emerge. This will hopefully result in a communitarian, egalitarian community where all feel refreshed and joyful, dancing and celebrating the gift of life. The wisdom of nature reveals that compassion, which is cosmic in scope, is vital for our wellbeing. Mother Earth has shown us the way. She has evolved over the ages through cooperation, coordination, patient groping and searching. All species including human beings are inter-related and inter-connected in a life and death fashion to one another. When this happens, life will perdure. *Nature Protects if She is Protected*. (COP-11 Logo, Hyderabad). When we keep destroying and hurting Mother Earth, we are hurting ourselves in the process as well, and the pandemic and COVID-19 will continue.



This lent let us be compassionate to ourselves, to all around and to our beloved



Mother Earth. *'I' exist because 'we' exist*- Bishop Allwyn's Lenten Reflection Calendar 2021 (Week 4). *Let us become witnesses of new times, in which God is making all things new* (Rev. 21:1-6). Let us depend on God-the crucified Lord who has Risen. Let God unfold the mystery of life to us this lent.

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