

COMPASSION

The way of compassion is truly beyond seeing love as a duty, an attitude we “should” have, but simply and radically a new way of being in the world, a new way of (freely) relating. The conversion that is called for is an awakening to our true self, our true home. Such a conversion is essentially imaginative: being captured by an image of God that is worthy of our love and attention. Beyond niceness or kindness even, this is a truly revelatory and transformative way of being; reflecting or revealing who God is.

When compassion for the afflicted is really found we have a more astounding miracle than walking on the water, healing the sick, or even raising the dead.

Simone Weil

Compassion does not, of course, mean to feel pity and to condescend, but to feel with.

Karen Armstrong

Radical compassion, in which an individual puts his own life at risk in order to help another, points to a truth about humankind as being fundamentally oriented to the other, which is simultaneously a truth which God has revealed about himself.

Oliver Davies

The truth about God is that God is fundamentally oriented towards the other. This is who God is for us. Communion, or community, is not about like-mindedness, but thrives on difference and otherness.

Raimond Gaita, the Australian philosopher, says that love is the name we give to that behaviour which has the power to reveal the full humanity of those whose affliction has rendered them invisible. Who do you find it difficult to see, really see and hear? There will be people in your family and circle of acquaintances: but there are also others: a refugee, a drunk, a homeless person...

Ian McEwan, the novelist says: "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion and the beginning of morality. " Imagination is a wonderful dimension to intercessory prayer. Begin with someone you know and love - and who is perhaps ill. Take time and imagine her... what it would be like in her place... in time you could move on to people you hardly know – or don't even like.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for our friends.

John 15:13

Philip Carter is a retired Anglican Priest. He was the inaugural president of the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction (AECSD). He ran the Julian Centre in Adelaide, an independent and ecumenical centre for spirituality, from 1997-2009.

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