

## SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

**1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38**

### COMPASSIONATE LOVE

The subject of bioethics (Greek *bios* meaning *life* and *ethos* meaning *behavior*) has concerned humanity from time immemorial, though the term was first used in 1927 by a German theologian Fritz Jahr (1895-1953). Broadly referred to as *global ethics* in modern scholarship, this discipline addresses the realities of the sciences and how ethically or morally they can solve problems which affect life. Hence, bioethics deals with questions of moral values and religious beliefs and practices, as well as the use of animals, humans, and plants in medical and other scientific research. This field of study faces many serious moral questions and dilemmas. In the last three decades, bioethical studies have extended to cover a broad spectrum of human problems such as abortion, euthanasia, surrogacy, same-sex marriage, organ donation, assisted suicide, exorcism, the right to reject medical care for religious or cultural reasons, and environmental concerns. Over the years, presidents of the United States have instituted Presidential Commissions for the Study of Bioethical Issues to advise the president to fund research in these areas.

Remarkably, other values or acts such as compassion, generosity, and unlimited or unmeasured love have also become subjects or concerns of scientific interest in bioethics since the 1990s, with millions of dollars from institutions and government allotted for research. The etymology of the word *compassion* in Latin means *co-suffering*. It is a strong human feeling described as “the virtue of empathy for the suffering of others,” which hinges on identifying with another person’s precarious condition. Unlike the feeling of sympathy usually described as the expression of “sorrow and concern,” empathy connotes “warmth and care.” When we feel empathy, we desire a higher level of compassion, known as altruism or altruistic love. Thus, compassionate people show altruistic love and express this quality with practical and concrete love (benevolence) to help ease the sufferings of other persons physically, mentally, emotionally, and economically. Compassion implies patience, wisdom, kindness, perseverance, warmth, and resolve.

The expression *compassionate love* emerged when the World Health Organization (WHO) organized a research meeting for “developing tools to assess the quality of life to be used in diverse cultures.” Initially, words and phrases for consideration at the meeting, comprising experts from both religious and non-religious bodies, included “loving kindness” and “love for others.” According to one of the resource persons, Lynn G. Underwood, a search for an appropriate word was a prominent concern. Buddhists at the meeting preferred the word *compassion* to *love*. The Muslims, mainly from Indonesia, India, and Turkey, favored *love* since it connotes the “feeling of love.” The deliberations ended with a compromised phrase, *compassionate love*, defined as love that “centers on the good of the other.”

Since the last couple of decades, companies have organized seminars on compassionate love to underscore its benefits to the corporate world. Increasingly, politicians and CEOs of corporations, as well as social and religious leaders, see the need to manage their institutions compassionately. In schools and colleges, similar programs on compassion or compassionate love gear towards stopping bullying and inculcating into students the virtues of patience, tolerance, acceptance, self-control, and mercy. Such programs emphasize that compassionate love can bring about lasting happiness and peace in any human setting.

Susan Sprecher and Beverley Fehr (2005) succinctly defines compassionate love as an attitude toward others, close or strangers or all of humanity, focused on caring, concern, tenderness, and an orientation toward supporting, helping, and understanding them, particularly when one perceives the other to be suffering or in need. They also quote the definition of compassionate love by Lazarus (1991) as “being moved by another’s suffering and wanting to help.” Compassion is known elsewhere as the “bedrock for kindness and selflessness” imploring “both empathy (putting yourself in someone else’s shoes) and sympathy (feeling sad, sorry, or distressed) on someone’s behalf” (*BetterHelp Editorial Team, 2025*).

The scientific world today is replete with scientific research on *global ethics*, aiming to find solutions to ethical issues, peace, and happiness. Yet, ironically, it is common knowledge that “compassionate love” is one of the most basic human feelings or virtues talked about through the millennia in nearly all religions and cultures. Ancient sacred texts in Hinduism mention *compassion* from the time prior to 1500 B. C. One such text defines *compassion* as “refraining from harmfulness,” and counts among the three-cardinal virtues in life: self-restraint, charity, and compassion.

In Judaism, “God the Compassionate” (Rahmana) is one of the most revered attributes of God. God’s mercy and compassion are compared to a mother’s love for her child (Isaiah 49:15). When asked to summarize the Jewish religion, a first century Rabbi, Hillel the Elder, replies, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah. The rest is the explanation: go and learn.” Some Jewish traditions enjoin humans to be compassionate to animals. Today, there is the clarion call to treat all sentient life forms, including the environment, with compassion, a notion fundamental to the philosophy of animal rights.

In Buddhism, *compassion (karuna)* is the “Buddha seed or Buddha nature” possessed by all to become Buddhas. Meditation encourages us to develop our Buddha seed or nature to achieve “great compassion” in easing the suffering of all living beings pragmatically. According to Mahayana Buddhism, compassion involves “coming face-to-face with the suffering of all sentient beings.” Responding to a similar question about what summarizes Buddhism, the Buddha is purported to reply: “It would be true to say that the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion is all of our practice.” In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Candrakirti, an Indian Buddhist teacher, wrote that kindness is like water that makes a seed grow. The Dalai Lama also said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

Mercy and Compassion (Rahman and Rahim) are among the most important attributes of God in Islam. Indeed, all but one of the 114 chapters (Suwar, singular surah) of the Holy Quran follows the phrase: “In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.” The Muslim must therefore emulate Allah and show compassion to widows, orphans, and the poor. One saying attributed to the Prophet Mohammad is that “Allah is more merciful to His servants than a mother to her dear child.”

Today’s readings give us more perspectives of compassionate love. In the first reading, David quietly goes into Saul’s camp and finds him sleeping and unguarded. He sees Saul as God’s anointed, forgives his evil deeds, and shows him mercy. He does not kill Saul, who has organized a vast army in pursuit of David to kill him. The jealous and disgruntled Saul, on the other hand, worsens his lot with intense hate and revenge at an anointed of the Lord. This is a good example of how we must desist from fighting evil with evil and embrace the call to fight evil with love. David believed God would protect him from harm.

Saint Paul speaks against taking revenge on those who hurt us: “Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God’s anger do it.” He adds, “Do not let evil defeat you, instead, conquer evil with good,” by

feeding your enemies with food, drink, and other needs (Romans 12:19-21). In the second reading, Paul shows how, through Jesus, we shall possess heavenly blessings when mercy and forgiveness become our way of life. He speaks about God who comforts us in times of difficulties, and we are to comfort others who are suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

In today's Gospel reading, we are hearing an extension to the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Plain in the Gospel of Saint Luke. Jesus teaches about Christian compassion of love predicated on divine mercy and calls his disciples to treat each other with mercy: "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). Saint Matthew's version of the Beatitudes, referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, uses the word "perfect" saying, "You must be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Matthew proclaims perfection as the highest virtue to aspire in life that gets one closer to God. We must, therefore, strive to achieve true perfection in mercy through forgiveness, generosity, kindness, and love. The discourse on mercy in both Luke and Matthew include the Golden Rule: "Do unto others what you would have them do to you." Jesus adds, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly." Again, "Forgive others, and God will forgive you." Indeed, "The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you." This is Jesus' new commandment package replacing the Old Testament retributive or retaliatory justice (Matthew 5:43-44).

Therefore, Christians must willingly embrace compassionate love, sometimes suppress their own interests, and assist the less privileged; the Parable of the Good Samaritan is the perfect model of this. In the parable, the Good Samaritan expects no rewards in return for his compassionate love. He promises to pay all bills to get the assaulted Jew completely healed. This is a powerful example. Doing this for family and friends may be incumbent, but we must delve deep into our souls and recognize all others as children of God. As a great bioethicist, Jesus gives a great moral teaching of how we can conduct ourselves in life: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself," and "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

In my homilies, I often gladly reference a close friend, Dr. Bruce Charash. He is committed to following in the footsteps of Jesus to show compassionate love to the poor. He was founder of "Doc to Dock," a non-profit organization based in the USA though now non-operational. At the cost of thousands of dollars from his own resources and sponsors, his team of volunteers packed containers of medical supplies to developing countries for many years. Dr. Charash is Jewish but believes peace and stability are attainable in the world if people listen to Jesus and live his message of love and compassion. Below is an excerpt from one of his letters to me about love and compassion extended to people in despair, especially in poor countries:

*All of this said, I am the luckiest man alive. I can serve our Lord and Savior with the ample resources he has given me. Not too many people are that lucky. But I am lucky. I am driven by my greatest gratitude to Jesus Christ, for he has saved me; yet it is without merit. I have been saved solely by Grace. This, in turn, has filled me with joy that empowers me to move mountains in his name. It empowers me to help, with every breath I have, to serve the people in this world who are suffering and dying before their time. I was born in a country which provided me with the opportunity to not only survive but to achieve great success. This is not a burden to me. This is my way to thank our Lord for my salvation.*

Dr. Charash is saying that our compassionate love for others is our natural response to Jesus' love for us: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). Unfortunately, Dr. Charash been unable to sustain this noble foundation because of lack of sponsorship.

Whatever your status, what are some blessings you have received?

In what ways are you living the Gospel message by reaching out to others, especially the poor and the suffering, with compassionate love?

What instances do you think vengeance is the right way? But are you courageous to show mercy and forgiveness to those who have hurt you?

In your relationships with spouse, children, friends, coworkers, and community, do you endure wrongs patiently, and always seek peace?

The Peace of the Lord be with you.

### **Saint Paul's Message for Compassion**

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:12-13).*