

Compassion

By Rev. Terry Schnarr

"When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep'" (Luke 7:13).

Jesus is a God of love and compassion, of mercy and forgiveness. He is a loving and merciful God. He is tender, understanding, and gentle with us. He loves us dearly.

Last Sunday we were encouraged to pick one day this week to compel ourselves to practice one teaching of the Lord all day, to consciously try very hard to work on it. Did you try? How did it go? Perhaps you intended to but forgot. Perhaps you started to keep some teaching in mind but forgot after a short time. Perhaps you tried but intermittently forgot during the day. Perhaps you were able to keep it up all day and even did it for two or more days.

If you forgot, or didn't try, or tried and failed, how did you feel? Did you conclude, "I'm just no good," "I can't do this," "I can't even remember the Lord for one day," or "I'm just a heathen"? How many of you had this kind of experience and those kinds of thoughts? How many of you felt defeated, hopeless, like giving up, or guilty? Maybe you feel bad or guilty right now. Maybe you feel despairing of ever getting closer to the Lord, of ever having the strength and determination to exercise your freedom and willpower to compel yourself to do the Lord's will.

"Do not weep." All of those kinds of thoughts and experiences are from hell. The evil spirits are fighting you. They are the ones putting those thoughts into your head. It feels as if they are your own thoughts, but they are not. They are from the evil spirits who are with you. They are trying to stop you, make you feel hopeless, and make you give up. Don't let them win. Keep at it. Keep trying. It takes perseverance and practice, but with a little patience you will be able to do it because the Lord is with you and is giving you the power to do His will.

He is not angry with you. He isn't giving up on you. He is still with you, loving you, having compassion on you. He is keeping the evil spirits away and preventing them from making you feel worse. He is surrounding you with angels so that you can do what He wants. Don't quit trying. What the Lord is concerned with is the intention of your will.

Keep trying. The Lord is completely understanding of the difficulties and challenges we face. His mercy and compassion and forgiveness are unconditional.

This is so evident from many stories in the Word. When He came to Jerusalem and looked down over it from the Mount of Olives, from the east, He wept. From His love He could see there was no love and charity left in Jerusalem. He wept because He was grieving for the people who had no love, no charity, no understanding, no light, and no truth. They were confused and in darkness. He went to the temple, cleansed it, and began to teach and heal to give them help.

There is never any anger in the Lord, only love and compassion. He is love itself and cannot possibly be angry. Even when there is an appearance of anger, as when He cleansed the temple, He was really acting from love, mercy and compassion.

The Lord never punishes either. He is always understanding and forgiving. Even when there is an appearance of punishment, as when people are said to be sent to hell, the Lord is acting from love and mercy allowing them to choose their life and providing a place for them to pursue their evil loves, all the while trying to restrain them from plunging into lower hells and greater frustration and dissatisfaction.

In the original Hebrew, Jehovah's compassion is expressed by a word which means the inmost and tenderest love. Such love is pictured by the Lord's looking for the one lost sheep and carrying it back in His arms.

The Lord has compassion on all of us. He especially has compassion on us when we are in ignorance, when we lack a knowledge of truth and wish we had more, because we are then in doubt and confusion. He is also especially compassionate on us when we are deficient in love and desire to have more good loves, because we are then feeling empty and devoid of life, lacking the blessings and delights which come from doing good and using our talents to serve Him.

Nevertheless, the Lord does not intercede, step in, and change us or fix us. He works to maintain our freedom, controlling the spirits around us so that we are free to approach Him. He never interferes with our lives, but always tries to make the path to His door the easiest path to follow so that we will choose to follow Him.

When we do choose to follow Him, to obey His teachings, then He enters into our lives with love and wisdom, giving us good desires, enlightened thoughts, and joys when we do good works of charity for others.

The Lord is especially close to us, actually dwelling inside of us, when we have compassion on others, when we love and care for one another the same way He loves and cares for us. We cannot be compassionate when we are in truth alone, when we know truths but do not act on them in our daily lives. We become compassionate, loving, and caring toward others only when we do the good works the Lord teaches us in the Word because to do them we have to quit being selfish and materialistic to have time and energy to do for others. When we do good works, then the Lord fills us with love and compassion for others. For example, He forgives us our sins when we forgive others their sins against us.

When we have compassion for others, we enter into a closer relationship with the Lord. The Heavenly Doctrines teach us that when we feel pity or compassion toward others, the Lord enters into us with an influx of love. This is said to be an admonition, a kind of suggestion or command from the Lord to reach out to another person. "When those who are in perception feel compassion," we read, "they know that they are being admonished by the Lord to give aid" (AC 6737). When we feel compassion, we are being urged and prompted by the Lord to act. This is one way of experiencing the Lord in our lives.

He is especially compassionate toward us when we have been suffering spiritual miseries and temptations. The widow of Nain was suffering grief and despair over the loss of her husband and now her only son. "A large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"

To not weep means to be consoled, we are taught in the Heavenly Doctrines. Not only does the Lord have compassion on us but He acts on His compassion. He gives us consolation. He consoles us. How?

The Lord consoles us three ways. First, when we pray to Him and approach Him He comes to us and surrounds us with angels. We are taught that He answers our prayers with something like a revelation, which is manifested or experienced in our affections as hope, comfort, or a kind of internal joy. Second, the angels stir up our thoughts to help us remember truths from the Word which can be helpful to us. Third, He

admonishes other people to come around to give us support and assistance, even as many people in Nain were gathered around the widow who had lost her husband and only son.

A man who was covered with leprosy came to Him, imploring Jesus to help him. He was not just asking for a simple favor; he was begging for his life with complete humility. He came to Jesus as his last hope. He got down on his knees and said, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

The leper's dramatic example demonstrates to us the kind of attitude we need to bring to the Holy Supper. We need to acknowledge Jesus Christ as our God, as the only one who can save us from our evils, as the only one who has the power to cleanse our minds. We need to acknowledge Jesus as the only hope we have left for our salvation because He really is. When we kneel down to take the bread and wine, we would do well to keep the words of the leper in our thoughts: "If you are willing, You can make me clean."

"Jesus, moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed" (Mark 1:40-42). "Jehovah is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him" (Psalm 111:4,5). He is "slow to anger and great in mercy. Jehovah is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145:8,9).

Jesus is willing to help you. Jesus is more than willing. He desires nothing more than to cleanse your spirit so that He can be with you and be inside of you. This is His love. Ask for His help and you will receive it; seek for His power and you will find it; knock and He will open up the door for you and come in with all the blessings of peace and happiness. He will do for you as He did for the widow of Nain, an ordinary person like you and me. "When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep'" (Luke 7:13). Amen.

Lessons: Luke 7:11-17, Mark 1:35-45, AC 6737