

Be Compassionate

If we're to be compassionate as Jesus was, we must be willing to pay the price that compassion sometimes demands. Some years ago an old man collapsed on a busy street corner in downtown Brooklyn. Within minutes an ambulance rushed him to Kings County Hospital. There he kept calling for his son. A nurse found a dog-eared letter in the man's wallet. From it she learned that his son was a marine stationed in North Carolina. That night an anxious marine showed up at the hospital. Immediately, the nurse took him to the old man's bedside. The man was heavily sedated. And so the nurse had to tell him several times, "Your son is here! Your son is here!" Finally, the old man opened his eyes. He could barely make out his son, but he recognized his marine uniform. At that point, the son took his father's hand and held it lovingly.

For the rest of that night, the marine sat at the old man's bedside. Occasionally, he patted the man's hand and spoke to him tenderly. Several times the nurse urged the marine to take a break and get something to eat or drink. But he refused. Toward dawn, the old man died. When the nurse extended her sympathy to the young man, the marine said, "Who was that man?" "Wasn't he your father?" the nurse asked. "No, he wasn't," said the marine.

"Why didn't you say something?" said the nurse. "I would have," said the marine. "But I could see that he was too sick to realize I wasn't his son. I could also see that he was slipping fast and needed a son. So I decided to become that son. I never saw him before in my life."

I like that story for two reasons. First, it illustrates the kind of compassion that Jesus showed the leper in today's gospel. Mark says that when Jesus saw the leper, he was moved with pity, stretched out his hand, and healed him. That's exactly what the marine did. When he saw the man, he was moved with pity, stretched out his hand, and took the man's hand in his own. And so, first of all, the story shows the marine treating the old man with the same compassion that Jesus showed to the leper.

This leads to the second reason why that story is so beautiful. It's because it shows the marine gladly paying the high personal price that his compassion demanded. Although he was bitterly tired from his long day and lack of sleep, he stayed and held the old man's hand throughout the night. He did what Jesus did so often in the Gospel. For example, Mark says that on one occasion Jesus was so besieged by people that it was impossible for him to eat. (Mark 3:20)

Yet Jesus never let that interfere with his ministry of compassion to those who needed him. He gladly paid the personal price that it cost him.

You are loved

Deacon Dan