

*SPIRITUAL ASSOCIATION OF THE
COMPASSIONATE HEARTS OF
JESUS AND MARY*

**SOME PRINCIPLES of COMPASSION
for a COMPANION**



*“In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful”
(بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ basmala of the Qu’ran)*

The principle of Compassion lies at the heart of all the world’s major religious, ethical and spiritual traditions. Christians are called by their Master to be compassionate as Christ’s Father is compassionate, a call we seek to heed realising that this is the way of the Reign of God.

These *Principles* are intended to offer a means of reflecting on some of the ways in which we might develop a compassionate heart. For ease of use they are divided into daily portions but are also separated into sections which might be read together. The idea for creating them owes much to those Principles which guide the lives of members of the *Society of S. Francis*.

Knowing that many will have other obligations and commitments, these reflections should not be regarded as a burdensome routine to be undertaken. Rather it is hoped they might be of some interest and assistance in nurturing the great, universal virtue of compassion.

Ergo misericordes sicut et Pater vester misericors est

A. UNIVERSAL COMPASSION

DAY 1

'In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.' (Luke 1:78-79)

Aware of the lure of life-diminishing forces, which are sometimes difficult to avoid, Companions seek to stand against these, giving attention to that which builds up rather than diminishes others. We seek to be rooted in the guiding principle of God's compassionate love for us and the whole of creation. The desire to put others down or find in them some wrong can have no place in the life of a Companion.

1. COMPASSION AND LIFE IN CHRIST

DAY 2

'When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' (Matt.13:36-38)

'When Jesus was moved to compassion, the source of all life trembled, the ground of all love burst open and the abyss of God's immense, inexhaustible and unfathomable love revealed itself. ... (Compassion is) a movement in the womb of God (where) all the divine tenderness and gentleness lies hidden.'¹ Seeing we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves, God was moved with compassion towards us and, in Christ, came to share in our life. Through His life, death and resurrection Companions recognise that Love which He incarnated.

DAY 3

When Jesus was asked "What is the greatest Commandment?" he replied by quoting the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4/5): "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind" adding: "and your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18)

Companions remember that the first object of their love is Love itself, Love which pours out upon them and upon all of creation. In particular we will cherish this primary Commandment knowing that, as we seek to sit in God's compassionate gaze, our hearts will be remade in the image of that Divine Love. By this means we will come to a more perfect love for our neighbours – and ourselves.

DAY 4

In a world where hatred and fear, prejudice and bigotry are all too prevalent and suffering is constantly before our eyes, Companions are aware of the ease with which they can become blind and deaf to the *Schema*. The first principle, therefore, by which we seek to live is that which commands us to love as Christ loved: *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34/35)

DAY 5

"God loved us before he made us; and his love has never diminished and never shall." ²

Knowing themselves held in that Love their first desire is to relish and be moulded by that Love whereby they were brought into being.

Companions, therefore, will seek the good of others and wish no one evil. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."* (Ps. 51)

2. COMPASSION AND THE HEART OF JESUS

DAY 6

'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' (Ezekiel 36:26)

In speaking of the heart Companions are recalled to the centre of their being, the driving force of life and the place where God abides from which we establish who we really are. We receive inspiration from S. Benedict's invitation to the conversion of life in his Rule:

'Listen carefully, my child, to your master's precepts, and incline the ear of your heart' ² and *'let us hear with attentive ears the warning which the divine voice cries daily to us, "Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts"'* ³

DAY 7

'The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse — who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart,' (Jer. 17:9-10)

Companions realise that the task of refashioning their heart in the image and likeness of the Sacred Heart of Jesus needs constant attention. They try to do this by daily meditation and reflection, acts of kindness and by seeking to cultivate good desires.

3. COMPASSION AND THE MOTHER OF JESUS

DAY 8

Companions are nurtured by the Compassionate Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Being fully human, Jesus will have learnt about compassion from His parents and, in particular, His mother.

Of those closest to Jesus the Gospels reveal much about Mary's relationship with Him. In particular Companions will be drawn to stand with her at the foot of the Cross where she looked upon her Son in His Passion and Death until, finally, in deep anguish her gaze rested on Him as His body was laid in her lap.

DAY 9

"Everyone can find their struggles and sadness hidden in the folds of Mary's robe of sorrows." 4

In seeking to be living lives according to the compassion shown by Jesus, His Mother shows the way in which those closest to Him must learn the cost of compassion.

"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2:34/35)

DAY 10

"The Virgin, with her mother's grief, participated in a quite particular way in the Passion of Jesus, cooperating deeply with the salvation of mankind. Like Mary, each of us can and must unite with the suffering Jesus in order to become, with his own pain, an active part in the redemption of the world which he effected in the Paschal Mystery." 5

There are seven moments in the life of her Son when we see the heart of His mother being pierced:

- 1) The Prophecy of Simeon. (Luke 2:34–35)
- 2) Their Flight into Egypt. (Matthew 2:13)
- 3) The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:43–45)
- 4) The Meeting of Mother and Son on the Via Dolorosa. (Luke 23:27)
- 5) The Crucifixion. (John 19:25)
- 6) The Piercing of the Side of Jesus and His Descent from the Cross. (Matt. 27:57–59)
- 7) The Burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea. (John 19:40–42)

In recalling these moments the hearts of Companions are moved and softened.

B. GUIDING TRUTHS OF COMPASSION

4. THE ROOT OF SUFFERING

DAY 11

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be compassionate, therefore, as your heavenly Father is compassionate' (Matt.5: 43-48)

To act or speak out of spite, bigotry, hatred or self-interest; to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody and to incite hatred by denigrating others - even our enemies – diminishes us and is a denial of our common humanity.

DAY 12

Compassion is not tested in the garden of our choice but in the deserts of life where we are led. For if we are to love the God whom we have not seen, we must first learn to love those whom we have. (1 Jn. 4:20)

5. SIN AND SUFFERING

DAY 13

"Sin has no substance, not a particle of being, and can only be detected by the pain it causes." ⁶

Any faults Companions see in others must be subjects for prayer rather than criticism. They must be more diligent to take the log out of their own eye than the speck out of their neighbour's. (Matt 7.5)

And when through human frailty they fail in their high endeavour, they will turn to Christ with humble contrition and earnest purpose of amendment; and they hold in special esteem that Sacrament of Reconciliation whereby we are cleansed from sin and renewed in the life of grace.

DAY 14

God saw everything that He had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Gen.1:31)

Companions seek to look upon the world with the eye of God.

Whilst some may look and see only the worlds brokenness, Companions will approach all created things with a thankful heart realising the hand of God has brought them into being. They will pray for the restoration of all things in Christ. (*Acts 3: 19-26*)

6. BROKENNESS AND SUFFERING

DAY 15

'The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.' (*Romans 8:19-21*)

Recognising that suffering is part of the world in which we live, Companions seek to develop a heart which will lovingly engage with the causes and consequences of being heralds of God's Reign.

They will seek to express compassion in concrete ways, especially towards those who suffer and those who fall into sin.

DAY 16

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves." (*Phil 2.3*)

Whilst many suffer bodily or psychological disorders, Companions are aware of the way we also suffer if we expect others to conform to our expectations, want others to be like us, seek to exercise power over others for our own advantage or allow ourselves to be driven by unfulfilled, disordered desires. Such disordered desires cause suffering to others but will, in hidden and damaging ways, cause suffering to ourselves.

Companions, therefore, desire to refrain from seeking others to be like us and from all contemptuous thoughts of another. They will not look for pre-eminence or control but be generous in their judgements, regarding others as better than themselves.



C. THE PATH OF COMPASSION

7. PRAYER

DAY 17

'It is for this com-passionate heart that we pray when we say: "A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, nor deprive me of your holy spirit" (Ps 51).

God's compassionate heart does not have limits. God's heart is infinitely greater, than the human heart. It is that divine heart that God wants to give us so we can love all people without burning out or becoming numb.... The Holy Spirit of God is given to us so that we can become participants in God's compassion and so reach out to all people at all times with God's heart.' ⁷

To journey along the path of Compassion we are aided by Prayer, Thankfulness and Non-judgemental living.

DAY 18

Praise and prayer must constitute the atmosphere in which Companions strive to live.

Held in the ocean of God's love they will give time to being aware of that Love so that it permeates their lives as they seek to love others the way Christ loves them. They will also reflect daily on the way they have responded to the call of that love in their desire to live out of the Heart of Christ.

And when they find that they are blinded to Divine Compassion they will have recourse to the simplicity of prayer: *'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.'* (Ps.51:10)

8. THANKFULNESS

DAY 19

'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-22)

Companions will seek to be thankful at all times and in all places, for a thankful heart reflects the heart of our Master.

It is more important to be living lives of thankfulness than to chastise oneself for one's failings. They recall that as their Master willingly washed the feet of His disciples, so He also instituted the great Sacrament of Thanksgiving by which He continues to feed them with His divine life.

D. THREE MOVEMENTS TO A COMPASSIONATE HEART

9. FROM REACTION TO CONTEMPLATION

DAY 20

'Be silent, still, aware, for there within your heart the Spirit is at prayer. Open and find heart-wisdom. Christ' ⁸

Our reactions to the events of daily life come from a mixture of emotions. Recognising there are times when these responses are due to feelings of irritation, impatience, self-righteousness, hatred or anger, Companions seek to avoid hasty reactions that do not allow time to offer a considered response. They seek to nurture stillness and silence in their heart where they encounter God the all-merciful, the compassionate, so that their responses may come from a place of compassion. And when they are not guided by that virtue they will acknowledge their fault and ask for mercy.

'Deliver us, Lord we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.' ⁹

'Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.' (Eph. 4:31/32)

10. FROM JUDGEMENTALISM TO GENEROSITY

DAY 21

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." (Matt.7:1/2)

Knowing the ease with which they fall into condemning others in their hearts, Companions need to heed the words of their Master and seek to live non-judgmentally.

And when they do realise they have condemned another in thought, word or deed they will pray for them in words such as: “*May (you) be well; may (you) be happy; may (you) know the compassion of Christ.*”

11. FROM BROKENNESS TO TENDERNESS

DAY 22

‘The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.’

The Gospel tells us constantly to risk a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.’¹⁰

E. THE THREE NOTES OF OUR LIFE

DAY 23

The Three Notes that must mark the life of a Companion are Humility, Love and Kindness. When we are seeking the means to nurture these then we may be sure that the Lord who practised them will aid us in our endeavour.

12. HUMILITY

DAY 24

We must strive to keep ever before the eye of our heart the example of Him who emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave (*Phil 2.7*) and who, on the last night of his life, humbly in the guise of a slave washed his disciples’ feet. (*cf Jn 13.4-5*).

Companions seek, after the pattern of Christ, to clothe themselves with humility in their dealings with others. (*1 Pet 5.5*) Humility is the ground of our being, the recognition of the truth about God and ourselves, the awareness of our own insufficiency and dependence, seeing that we have nothing which we have not received.

As S. John Chrysostom said, *Humility is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue.*¹¹ We must remember that when we are always confident we are right and eager to impose our opinion on others, we carry a burden that is hard to bear and one that will be a cause of unhappiness when we find ourselves corrected.

DAY 25

Companions must refrain from all contemptuous thoughts of others and, not seeking for pre-eminence or praise, must regard others as better than themselves. (*Phil 2.3*) The faults they might see in others must be subjects for prayer rather than criticism and they must be more diligent to take the log out of their own eye than the speck out of their neighbour's. (*Matt 7.5*) They must be ready not only gladly, when invited, to go and sit down at the lowest place (*Lk. 14.10*), but rather of their own accord take it.

In relations with others they must strive to show their Master's humility. In particular they must resist the temptation to consider themselves superior to others, realising how much greater often are the unseen sacrifices and difficulties others bear and how much more nobly they face them.

13. KINDNESS

DAY 26

When Jesus went ashore he saw a great crowd; and He had compassion for them, and healed the sick. (Matthew 14:14).

Companions are called to act with kindness towards all living beings and to find ways of lessening the pain of suffering. They will seek to care for others, nurturing kindness and seeking to show qualities such as consideration, tenderness, willingness to share what they have and a readiness to give comfort, empathy and concern.

Companions know that care and love towards others has its origins in care and love for the self. We can understand others when we know and understand ourselves. We will know what's best for others when we know what's best for ourselves. We can have compassion for others when we have compassion for ourselves. We will be kind to others when we practise kindness towards ourselves.

14. SERVICE

DAY 27

"Action with and for those who suffer is the concrete expression of the compassionate life and the final criterion of being a Christian." ¹¹

Those who would claim to be His servants and follow Him must be diligent in ministry to others. (*Luke 4.18*), (*Isa 61.1*) Compassion impels us to work to alleviate suffering; to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put Another there; to honour the sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect. Companions will reject all that demeans others and find ways of working for the common good.

DAY 28

But chiefest of all forms of service that Companions can offer must ever be the effort to show others in His beauty and power the Christ who is the inspiration and joy of their own lives. They will seek to do this, not in a spirit of aggression, nor with contempt for the beliefs of others, but rather because, knowing in their own experience the power of Christ to save from sin and to give newness of life, they desire to share their own supreme treasure.

Out of the fullness, therefore, of devoted love we would seek to give our beloved Master to all. We must remember that, in this task of showing Christ to others, the witness of life is more eloquent than that of words.

Companions will welcome all who come to them for help or counsel. They will never give the impression that they have no time for such ministry. Rather they must be ready to lay aside all other work, including even the work of prayer, where such service is immediately required, confident that such a negligence will surely be well-pleasing to the Servant of all. ¹⁴

F. THE FULFILMENT OF COMPASSION

15. THE GOAL OF OUR DESIRES

DAY 29

Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who desire not worthless things and have not sworn so as to deceive their neighbour. (Psalm 24:3/4 Grail - adapted)

Like all Christians, Companions desire to be re-made in the image and likeness of Christ until they stand before Him who is their Judge and Saviour. We long to perfectly reflect Divine Compassion.

"The Lord doesn't look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love by which they are done." ¹⁵

DAY 30

'Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people.' ¹⁶

Divine Compassion, revealed in the lives of Christ and His Mother will be a constant source of meditation for Companions. In the way we live the compassion of Jesus and Mary must be revealed in all we do and say until it becomes incarnated in our lives

DAY 31

'If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.' (Col. 3:1-4)

Finally Companions, like all Christians, are called to a constant conversion of their hearts until they reflect the glory of God in whose image and likeness they are made. We must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt.6: 33) for where our treasure lies, there will our hearts be also. (Matt.6: 21)

O Jesu, O Sacred Heart, burning with Divine Love
send into my heart a spark of that fire which burneth in thee;
excite in me a burning and a flaming spirit;
impress upon me the seal of thy Love
that I may worthily perform thy work. ¹⁷

NOTES:

¹ *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life'*. Henri Nouwen. DLT. 2006

² *Rule of S. Benedict.* (Prov. 4:20 – Prologue to the Rule)

³ *ibid* (Ps.95:8)

⁴ *Revelations of Divine Love.* Julian of Norwich. Ch. 85

⁵ *Your Sorrow Is My Sorrow: Hope and Strength in Times of Suffering.* Joyce Rupp. Crossroad Press. 1999. ISBN: 0-8245-1566-8

⁶ attr. St. John Paul II. Source unknown

⁷ *Revelations of Divine Love.* Julian of Norwich. Ch. 27

⁸ Henri Nouwen. Quoted by the Henri Nouwen Society.

⁹ Inscription found in ruins of a medieval convent.

¹⁰ *The Communion Rite.* Roman Missal, 2010

¹¹ *Evangelii Gaudium* 72. Pope Francis:

¹² *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* S. John Chrysostom

¹³ *Henri Nouwen: Writings Selected With an Introduction.* R. A. Jonas. 1998. Orbis Books

¹⁴ *The Principles of the First Order SSF* Day 22 (amended)

¹⁵ *The Interior Castle.* S. Teresa of Avila. Ch.7:15

¹⁶ *Attributed to S. Teresa of Avila*

¹⁷ *A Pilgrim's Book of Prayer.* Fr. Gilbert Shaw. p.49. SLG Press. 2012