



Reflection from Fr. Garry Richmeier

The word "compassion" comes from the Latin root word "com," meaning "with," and the word "patio," which means "to suffer." Compassion therefore means to "suffer with." Someone who is compassionate has the ability to understand and be with another in their suffering.

Compassion sometimes seems to be in short supply these days. One reason is that much of our culture is centered around avoiding suffering. Our commercials all tell us that we needn't suffer doing without -- we can simply buy whatever we want. Our technological prowess has enabled us to have almost anything immediately at our fingertips, so we don't have to undergo the suffering of having to wait. The pharmaceutical industry tells us there's a pill for everything, so we don't have to suffer pain or discomfort. When much of our world is telling us that suffering is needless and we should avoid it at all costs, we can easily start questioning why we should voluntarily suffer with another person. What seems to happen too often is that people retreat into their own little sphere of comfort, insulating themselves from the suffering of others, and therefore not feeling the need to do anything about it.

No one likes suffering, but it is indispensable in making us human, and part of the human family. Someone who has suffered a divorce for example, often has a deeper understanding of, and compassion for, the pain of someone else experiencing divorce. We don't have to go looking for suffering, or find ways to suffer. Life provides that automatically. We don't get a choice about that. We do get to choose whether or not we allow another's suffering to resonate with ours and touch our hearts. When that happens, it may cost us some of our comfort, independence, and even freedom. But we gain a society, a world that is much more united, with people who are there for each other in the good times and the bad. That is probably well worth the price of suffering with others.

~ Peace,

Fr. Garry