

The Gospel of Mark shows how deeply Jesus cares for people. Five different stories show Jesus having pity for those he encounters. In the biblical sense, pity means to have compassion for another. Jesus feels more than distress at the plight of another, he is moved by love to respond to their needs.<sup>i</sup>

In Sunday's Gospel we will hear how Jesus is moved with pity for a Jewish leper. The ill man shows great respect for Jesus. He kneels before him pleading for help. Jesus responds with a miracle to heal the man. "Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, 'I do will it. Be made clean'" (Mk 1:41).

In the first encounter with the Gentiles, Jesus encounters the Gerasene Demoniac. Mark tells us that the man plagued by a legion of demons "had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him" (5:4). In compassion, Jesus heals him and sends the legion of demons into a swine herd that run off a cliff and into the deep lake. The man who was healed wants to stay close to Jesus, however, Jesus has a mission for him. "Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you" (5:19). The Lord sends this man on mission to bring others to him so that in his compassion, he may offer healing to others.

Jesus returns to the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee. "When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (5:34). In addition to feeding their spiritual hunger by teaching them, Jesus is concerned for their physical wellbeing. He offers bread and fish to the 5,000, feeding them until they are satisfied. His care and compassion exhibit the heart of the Good Shepherd.

Three chapters later, Jesus is again with the Gentiles. "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat" (8:2). Jesus has been feeding their spiritual hunger nonstop for three days. He is concerned they will not have the strength to walk home. This time, he feeds 4,000 and they too eat until they are satisfied.

In the 10th chapter of Mark, Jesus is leaving Jericho, a crossroad for people traveling east and west, north and south. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus for help for he is blind. "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me" (10:47). Those nearby try to silence the blind man, but Jesus will not ignore him. He calls Bartimaeus forward, hears why he has asked for help and responds to the man's faith by healing him.

Each time Mark shows Jesus being moved with pity, he responds with a miracle. Although, we do not have the miraculous powers of Jesus, how might we respond with our own compassion and mercy?

- The book of Proverbs teaches us: "Whoever cares for the poor lends to the LORD, who will pay back the sum in full" (19:17). "The generous will be blessed, for they share their food with the poor" (22:9). "Those who give to the poor have no lack, but those who avert their eyes, many curses" (28:27). Few have the resources to feed 4,000 or 5,000. The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Respond with compassion when you encounter one hungry person.
- Earlier this week, we celebrated the World Day of the Sick. While we may not have the power to cure a leper, help a blind man to see, or free a man possessed by demons, nevertheless, we may help those in need. Jesus "asks us to stop and listen, to establish a direct and personal relationship with others, to feel empathy and compassion, and to let their suffering become our own as we seek to serve

them.” What works one on one also works on a communal basis. “Fraternal love in Christ generates a community of healing, a community that leaves no one behind, a community that is inclusive and welcoming, especially to those most in need.”<sup>ii</sup>

Jesus provides us with many wonderful examples of caring for others when he is moved with pity. Let us never forget that Jesus is the just judge who teaches us, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:40).

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<sup>i</sup> [av1611.com/kjbp/kjv-dictionary/pitied.html](http://av1611.com/kjbp/kjv-dictionary/pitied.html)

<sup>ii</sup> [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201220\\_giornata-malato.html](http://vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-francesco_20201220_giornata-malato.html)