

Unlimited Compassion

Opting for joy does not mean running away from life's problems. Instead, it enables us to face reality, and even suffering. Opting for joy is inseparable from a concern for other human beings. It fills us with unlimited compassion. (Brother Alois, *Letter from Chile*)

Marlon (Zambia)

Only when I lost my parents did I come to understand the real definition of being poor. Homeless, with an empty stomach for some weeks or more, no clothes and without friends, because even the neighbors don't like people who are poor. I had to pretend that I didn't exist, spending many hours alone.

In that painful experience, God changed me by giving me a new heart, always wanting and dreaming to help the poor, especially orphans, because I've been there. After those painful days I had, God has blessed my life. He has given me a wonderful and amazing father (I was adopted when I was 16) who loves me the way I am. The more you give the more you receive. God loves a cheerful giver.

Being witnesses to communion requires the courage to swim against the stream. The Holy Spirit will give us the imagination we need to find ways of remaining close to those who suffer, to listen to them and to be affected by situations of distress.

Hesta (South Africa)

I think that what differentiates human beings from the rest of God's creation is that we were not only made purely to exist and to survive, but rather to live in unity with others. Each of us is suffering, for while still on earth, afflictions will always be part of our lives. This pain could be because we are wounded by the harshness of life, or from our own inward struggles.

Our job as Christians is to help relieve others of that pain—that's why we need a community. Yes, true joy, which can only come from God, can be present within us by living in a conscious union of love with others, for happiness is only real when it is shared.

If our communities, our parishes and youth groups could become more and more places of heartfelt kindness and trust—places where we welcome each other, where we seek to understand and support others, places where we are attentive to the weakest, to those who are not in our usual circle, to those who are poorer than we are.

Ignacio (Argentina)

At Rio la Barquita, on the border between Argentina and Uruguay, there is a little community of fishermen and working families who receive their daily bread by cutting bulrushes and certain species of trees. Life is really difficult in this village: among many other problems, bad weather can spoil ten days of cutting bulrushes.

During the summer, a priest and some youth live side by side with these people, without offering economic and social solutions, but intending to share God's love. And to show that even in the hardest situations, God is close to them and has not forgotten them. For my first mission, I was 15, and it really changed my way of living and viewing life.

When you visit these people's homes, when they open their hearts and it really becomes a dialogue from heart to heart, or when you play with the kids of the island, sometimes you can see the face of Jesus saying, "Everything you did for the least of my brothers, you did it for me."

One sign of our times is the great generosity with which so many people have come to the assistance of the victims of tragic natural disasters. How can this generosity motivate our societies, even in everyday life?

Kimiko, Jeffrey, Jun et Isao (Japan)

After the earthquake in March, four young people from Japan sent emails to Taizé, which Jens from Germany transcribed. In the messages received in the last months from our friends in Japan, it becomes evident that solidarity and mutual trust, but also the simple expression of compassion in words and prayers, help the victims much more than we are sometimes aware of.

“We have been so encouraged by the messages from outside of Japan”, says Kimiko, a girl who volunteered in the heavily stricken area of Sendai. “Please continue to pray for people in the area.” Jeffrey, who lives in Sendai, gives us a small image of how he sees the support from outside: “Many people came to Sendai to help. I am aware of the network of people who stand with us and pray for us.” Also Jun, who had spent times in Taizé as a volunteer, bears witness to the solace and relief victims can experience by the support of people who share in their distress: “I thank you so much for your thoughts and prayers. How strong we can feel, knowing that we are never alone and never abandoned. So many mails and messages came to me during the last weeks. All of them said they pray and think of Japan and its people.”

Following the earthquake, gatherings in the areas of the catastrophe to share and pray together were a source of courage to continue for the Christians there. “Even just a few hours after the earthquake, when all the trains and buses had stopped, we had a prayer meeting at one of the Anglican churches,” explains Isao from Tokyo.

Apart from the comfort we can find through prayer, the wish to help each other in practical ways was shown more strongly than ever in the Japanese people. Kimiko explains: “What happened was terrifying, but today I was very touched by people’s warm-heartedness. I had a chance to talk to persons whom I knew but had never talked to. A lot of strangers offered their help when we were in trouble. I saw solidarity which had been invisible and which people had thought was lost in our society.”

“It is not your possessions that you distribute to the poor; you are simply giving them back what belongs to them. For you have only kept for yourself what is given to all for the use of all. The earth belongs to all and not only to the rich, but it was expropriated by a few to the detriment of all who work it.” (Ambrose of Milan, fourth century)

Tatyana (Russia)

When you face suffering, when you see a child with a serious disease or meet a homeless person who doesn’t have anything, it is discouraging. Encountering suffering often makes us speechless: it seems to be too painful to open your heart to it, too risky to step out of your comfort zone and even try to think about it. But you always have a choice: to run away, to hide, to pretend that this suffering doesn’t exist in your life.

But we can also slow down our busy life, look the others in the eyes, acknowledge our inability and say: “I don’t have much love, I’m as poor as you are. You are as important for God as I am. I can’t truly share your life—but let me be with you in your trials and give you a hand”.

Over-accumulating material possessions kills joy. It keeps us trapped in envy. Happiness lies elsewhere: by choosing a simple lifestyle, working not just for profit but to give meaning to life, sharing with others, everyone can help create a future of peace.

Daniel (Slovakia)

To show that we love Christ does not just mean to go the other end of the world to point out how much we can do for others. The daily expression of God’s love is for me connected with mercy. When love for God is an expression of my faith, then mercy is my belief in practice. In the beginning of the twentieth century this message of God’s merciful love became stronger through the mission and life of Saint Faustina Kowalska, who spent her short but very rich and mystical life in deep connection with Jesus. In her diary can be found so many examples of this selfless love which can be put into practice.

When I see my limits, I understand I cannot do so much—but in trust, which comes out of my faith, I can live in dependency on God. And what at first seems to be fragility can turn into something which is beyond me—mercy in small, almost invisible things.