

Fr. Perozich comments —

He who controls the language controls the argument.

Slogans, clever quips and rhymes, can be used as darts thrown to undermine truth.

Euphemisms, softened and unclear presentation of the facts, also soften the listener to the harshness of bad behavior.

Redefinitions, applying a new meaning to words, changes the meaning in order to promote a novelty.

The Catholic Church's mission, to save souls from sin for eternal life, has fallen victim to these and other misdirections from Rome to the rest of the world. It seems to preach the world's views and not those of Jesus. Those who do preach Jesus' truth often are vilified.

To be **compassionate** means to suffer with someone as they move toward the Truth Who is Jesus Christ.

To be **pastoral** is to guide someone to that same Truth Who is Jesus Christ. It requires a **patience** in the human being who stands in the place of Jesus to allow Jesus to do the work of salvation in the life of the wayward while speaking the truth at the same time with gentleness and conviction.

One aspect of **tolerance** is to continue to love someone in their waywardness as Jesus loved the wayward while He was on earth, never approving sin, but patiently showing the way. We who are His disciples now need to do the same

Are You Compassionate?

By Abbot Joseph | September 2005

Abbot Joseph, a monk for 22 years, has for the past five years been the Abbot of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Redwood Valley, California, a Byzantine-rite monastery in the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

I have nothing but **compassion** for people who misuse the term “**compassion.**” This does not mean that I tolerate such misuse in the least, as you will see. One of the most beautiful divine qualities, in which we are invited to share — “Be compassionate as my Father is compassionate” (Lk. 6:36) — is all too often twisted into something that is tantamount to offering people a license to sin. “**Compassion,**” in modern parlance, means something like universal tolerance with a dose of sentimentality, which turns a blind eye to evil. In the Byzantine tradition, Christ is often called “The Lover of Mankind” and “The Compassionate One.” But He is never referred to as “The Tolerant One,” and with good reason.

There are different ways to express **compassion,** based on the need of those to whom we show mercy. To show **compassion** to the hungry is to give them food; to show **compassion** to the homeless and unemployed is to help them find housing and work. If you wish to be compassionate to the sick or elderly, comfort and assist them. But if you want to be like Jesus in showing compassion to sinners, invite them to repent.

Christ came into the world to save sinners. He didn't come to make sinners feel good about themselves or to instruct us on how to blur the distinction between good and evil, based on current trends or personal preference. Some people attempt to justify their (or society's) wrongdoing by saying, for example, that Jesus refused to condemn the woman caught in adultery and that He spent much of His time eating and drinking with sinners. They

don't seem to be willing or able to understand why He did that.

Jesus' words to the adulterous woman, "Neither do I condemn you" (Jn. 8:11), are filled with forgiveness, not tolerance. She knew her own sin, and He knew that she did, whereas the would-be stone-throwers weren't reflecting upon theirs. So Jesus had to deal with them first. But after He forgave the woman, notice that Jesus did not say, "Go, follow your feelings, celebrate diversity, and try not to hurt anyone." He said, "Go, and sin no more." To the paralytic, He added a further warning: "Sin no more, lest something worse befall you" (Jn. 5:14). Compassion does not equal tolerance, especially where sin is concerned. **If compassion, like genuine love, is not rooted in truth, it is at best misguided emotion, and at worst a refusal to enlighten a soul in danger of damnation.**

As for being found in the company of sinners, Jesus also gave His reason for that: Sick people need a physician. He ate with sinners, not to approve their lifestyle, but to call them to repentance (Lk. 5:29-32). Jesus knew, and the Church has always known — until relatively recently, it seems — that the salvation of souls is the most urgent and essential task that can be undertaken on earth. Therefore, **compassion** is expressed most perfectly by whatever one does for the eternal benefit of others. The most genuine love is concern for their salvation. Does it occur to anyone that Jesus was being compassionate to the money-changers by casting them out of the temple, or to the Pharisees by His fiery denunciations of their hypocrisy?

Everything He said or did was an expression of divine love and **compassion**, with the goal of leading people to everlasting life in Heaven. If people are unaware that their behavior is sinful, we must make them aware of it — not to hurt, but to heal; not to condemn, but to save.

Sometimes compassion is equated with a sort of nebulous, ineffectual “kindness,” one that ends up refusing to let someone know that his soul is in danger. God’s kindness is different: “Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). We are not being compassionate if we allow friends or loved ones to walk the broad path to perdition simply because we are too “kind” to upset them by attempting to awaken their consciences. Today’s “kind and compassionate” people say that God loves us as we are, but I once heard a wise and necessary addition to that statement: “but He loves us too much to let us stay the way we are.”

A number of years ago, a man who was a caregiver for AIDS patients (he was affiliated with a religious order) visited our monastery. In the course of our conversation I innocently asked him — not realizing at the time how inflammatory a question this was — if he encouraged the patients to reconcile with God before they died. His face acquired a horrified expression and he exclaimed: “Oh, no! We believe in a nonjudgmental God!” Is it compassionate to deny a sinner a last chance to repent? Is it compassionate thereby to consign him to Hell, with the kindly look on your face the last thing he sees? **That is the devil’s “compassion,” not the Lord’s.**

The Lord's **compassion**, however, goes beyond calling sinners to repentance. We have to be careful not to fall into pharisaical self-righteousness by limiting our relationship with public sinners to a perfunctory, even haughty: "You need to repent!" **To be compassionate is to be at the service of others' repentance.** Jesus went to the Cross to prove the genuineness of His love for sinners and desire for our salvation. "By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). This does not mean that we literally have to die for sinners — the only One who could effectively do that has done it — but it does mean that we have to pray fervently and make sacrifices for others, to speak the truth in love, making whatever practical efforts we can to contribute to the Church's work of saving souls, that is, of leading souls to the Savior. To paraphrase the Apostle John, let us not be compassionate only in word, but in deed and in truth.

In clerical circles, there's another similarly abused word: "pastoral." It seems that almost any manifest **disregard for Church teachings is practiced for "pastoral" reasons.** This usually includes tolerance of abortion, homosexual behavior, artificial contraception, or invalid marriages. How is it pastoral for a shepherd to encourage his sheep to walk into the mouth of the wolf? How are we being sensitive and caring by numbing consciences that will be rudely awakened — all too late — on Judgment Day? What kind of physician of souls will offer a temporary palliative when

the cure is available? Come on, doc, don't spare us the pain of the needle if the medicine is going to save our lives!

To speak the truth and to call sinners to repentance does not mean, however, to be hard-hearted, unfeeling, or unmoved by the real suffering and struggles of those who are in some kind of moral dilemma or state of sin. To be compassionate is also to listen, to "suffer with," and to carry them in loving prayer to God. But it is not compassionate merely to leave it at that, especially if simply being with others gives them the impression that they need not repent. **Repentance requires an inner awakening, an understanding of the state of one's soul, and a desire to do something about it.** It is neither regret without amendment nor a ritual sterilized by routine. **One must be willing to hear the word of the Lord and respond to it. Repentance is a redirection of our intentions, a change of heart, expressed by a change of behavior.** But this will never happen with an "I'm OK, you're OK" approach.

Nothing is impossible with God — not even fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church! But it will cost much. Eternal salvation is not a minor issue, and Christ warned us that the way is narrow and difficult. Ultimately, however, nothing else really matters. **If you lose your soul, you lose everything. Salvation is worth the price of faithfulness to the word of God. True compassion is encouragement to pay it.**

It matters what we believe and how we behave. The stakes are high in this adventure called human life. Truth is not relative and Hell is not merely a myth or a useful

scare tactic for Christian schoolteachers. **Aberrant behavior must not be elevated to an unalienable right, and personal opinions must not be put on a par with divine revelation.** Don't be so "kind" as to keep silent while others enshrine sin as an acceptable alternative to righteousness.

So you see why I have **compassion** for those who abuse the term "**compassion**," especially if they do so for "pastoral" reasons. I'm calling them to repentance. I'm concerned not only for their souls, but also — and especially — for those whom they mislead, whom they lull into spiritual somnolence. If any souls are lost, let it be only because they remained hardened in willful rejection of God until death — not because some "compassionate" person convinced them that they had no need to repent.

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