



## Compassion

Everyone admires the battler; it is very hard not too. We all are impressed by the stories of struggles and adversities; the joys, the pains, the agonies and the ecstasies; the eventual triumph in beating the odds. It can give us a warm fuzzy feeling of the happy ending to the fairy tale; it can also give us the inspiration to keep going when things don't go our way. It can give us the comfort that we are never alone in our plight; that others have been down the same road or up the same dry gully. Given the background of our country, the story of our beginnings as a nation, this sentiment is entrenched in the folklore of our culture, the spirit of "the little Aussie battler."

But what are some of these hurdles, handicaps, the insurmountable odds that we may have to face? We all have our own battles. We can quickly call to mind many of the things we have had to overcome and in many cases face on a regular, if not daily, basis. Name it and no doubt everyone can relate in some manner. Droughts, floods, bushfires. We are only too aware of financial disasters, sickness and physical disabilities, personal and family problems, all these things can be devastating to our life's journey.

But probably the greatest obstacles that can be encountered are ignorance and prejudice. These are the intangible factors that run as an undercurrent probably as a subconscious thing but when they become manifest, when they come to the surface, they can be very ugly and horrific. It is in the subconscious, the things that underlay our everyday thinking that things like ignorance and prejudice exists. Many things we may not have experienced first hand; but have been passed down to us in folklore, in hearsay; but they are still there in our decision making.

Even Jesus too had to overcome prejudices. In the gospels we read that his opponents called out "What good has ever come out of Nazareth?" We can all be guilty of this sort of thinking.

The gospel today is a great story of achievement over and beyond the odds. Unable to reach Jesus through the front door, the mates of the crippled man rip a hole in the roof and lower him down to where Jesus was standing. In the thinking of today's society,

they probably would be charged with destruction of property and illegal entry. Still a feat of faith to be admired.

But we should ask, "Why couldn't they get through the front door?" and "Why didn't the crowd let them through?" when this was exactly what Jesus was preaching about -- love and compassion for others. Maybe the crowd was just too tight, maybe the people were too intent on hearing the man from Galilee preach. But we also should consider that the paralysed man in those times had been probably forced onto the streets as a beggar to survive, and because of this, he and his mates may have been actively excluded because of who and what they were -- the ever present spectre of prejudice and ignorance.

From Isaiah

*"The Lord says this; No need to recall the past,  
no need to think about what was done before.  
See, I am doing a new deed,  
even now it comes to light; can you not see it?  
Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness,  
paths in the wilds."*

The prophet Isaiah elsewhere in the Old Testament exhorts us to *"Make a straight path for the Lord"*

In showing compassion and love for others, it is then that we doing the things that Jesus taught us and we truly can make a *"straight path for the Lord."*

Like the crowd in the gospel, even though we are doing the right things, we can be too busy, too focused on trying to do the right thing, we can totally miss, and we can unwittingly ignore the very thing we should be doing.

But it is hard to overcome our scruples, to show that compassion and love for others that Jesus calls us to have. And we can get caught out at any time, and in the most embarrassing situations.

Project Compassion sets us many goals during the season of Lent; not only the feel-good dollars that we put in the box, but more so to develop the love and compassion for others not as fortunate as us. We are called to minister to them in their plight and in their weaknesses; the unwashed, the smelly, the "drugos"; people whose lifestyles have left them busted and broken in body and soul; people whose beliefs and ideologies may be far different to our own but like all of us, they are reaching out, sometimes screaming out for love. We may find this distasteful at times, even repugnant, but we are called to try in the name of Jesus.

Let us consider the beautiful words from the psalm, "Happy the person who considers the poor and the weak." We are all spiritually poor and we all have our weaknesses so it is hard to judge others. The great quote says it all *"There but for the grace of God go I."*

Many times in the scriptures, Jesus took the few meager things that were in front of him at the time; the paltry loaves and fishes, the water-filled wine flagons at Cana, bread

and wine at the Last Supper, He gave thanks, blessed them and then shared them with others.

Project Compassion during this Lenten season, invites us to count our blessings, give thanks, and share at least some of what we have with others less fortunate.

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