**MARCH HANDOUT: MERCY & FORGIVENESS**

This living the Moral Life Session explores the role of forgiveness and compassion in moral living. It offers a moral decision making process for participants and challenges participants to live lives of compassion and forgiveness modeled on the compassion of Jesus Christ.

**Mark 10:46-52:**  **Jesus showing compassion to Bartimaeus**

Bartimaeus was a beggar. A person who was sick and disabled in Jesus’ time had to beg for a living, unless he or she had a family or friends to care for them. Beggars were totally dependent on the charity of others. In Jesus’ time, which was not that different from our own in this attitude, if you didn’t have money or a home or an education, you didn’t have much dignity, honor or prestige. You were a member of the lowest class, utterly dependent on others for food, shelter, and clothing.

Imagine the circumstances of Bartimaeus’ life. Imagine for a moment the impact Jesus would have had on his life. In the light of Bartimaeus’ experience of Jesus what do you think he would say the compassion of Jesus is like…or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

**Luke 7: 11-17: Jesus’ compassion-the Widow of Nain.**

In Jesus’ society, widowed women and children had no one to provide for them and no way to make a living. They were dependent on the charity and almsgiving of various groups and the Temple. In Jesus’ time being born female was to be born into a lower class; women were not allowed to be disciples of a scribe, nor could they take any leadership roles out side of the home. They were not allowed to be Pharisees or lead prayer in the Temple. Imagine the circumstances of the widow’s life. Imagine for a moment the impact Jesus would have had on her life.

In light of the widow’s experience of Jesus, what do you think she would say the compassion of Jesus is like…or what does the compassion of Jesus include?

Jesus gives us clear indicators of what compassion is all about. Fundamentally compassion involves 2 things:

**First,** compassion involves the **ability to be with another person in his or her time of need**, distress, or “passion”. The Latin root of the word compassion means “like passion, to have the same passion, or to enter into the experience of another’s passion.” We can never say that we know exactly how one feels, but we can be present to another and their emotional and physical realities in their time of need.

**Second,** compassion involves the **desire to alleviate, to help change if possible, the cause of distress for the other,** or to support the other as he or she moves through the distress. There are many time we cannot “fix” other’s situations, but we can support them through the use of our resources of time, energy, and finance.

There are people who model what compassion in today’s world looks like. They challenge us to live more compassionate lives and to make choices rooted in love and compassion.

At the heart of all moral decision making is the compassion and forgiveness of God. Making moral decisions is all about listening to our conscience and choosing actions that are of God.

***Do you think there are situations in which forgiveness is humanly impossible?***

***\*In light of what you have read in this article, what does forgiveness look like? What values, actions, and / or attitudes does it include?***

***\*What do you think makes it possible for people to offer forgiveness to another? For example, how is compassion a critical element of forgiveness?***

If it is true that **forgiveness is born of love** **and love is the flip side of forgiveness**, we might ask how we come to this love? And what does it look like?

**First, we come to love by loving**. A simple answer, yet not very helpful. Never the less, it expresses **a basic truth of the moral life**. We cultivate virtue by **performing virtuous acts**. If we wish to become a courageous person, we learn to act courageously. If we are to become chaste, we must perform chaste actions. In like matter, if we are to be people of love, we must perform loving acts.

If we are to become people of forgiveness we must practice acts of compassion and acts of forgiveness, intentionally choosing to be present to another and intentionally choosing to participate in forgiveness.

Sometimes it’s **hardest to forgive the ones we love the most**. Often, those are the ones we find ourselves in conflict with the most. Families who heal and reconcile well show some similar characteristics. Consider these points:

\*They recognize **conflict is inevitable**. Better to deal with it than deny it.

\*They spend their energy **seeking solutions rather than laying blame**. Playing the blame game goes no where.

\*They **distinguish the person from the act**. While some behaviors are reprehensible, each person is good and to be valued.

\*They understand the difference between **excusing and forgiving.**

\*They **ritualize and celebrate their healing**. They hug, laugh, eat…they do something to acknowledge that the hurt is gone.

***Which of these does your family have?***

***Which ones do you need to work on?***

***\*The most difficult thing about making moral decisions is….***

***\*When I make a moral decision, I usually consult…***

***\*I believe my conscience is important in making a moral decision because……***

***\*The tough moral issues people today are struggling with are….***

\*Think back over the past year. Recall issues or struggles that required you to make a moral choice or decision.

\*As you review the choices and decisions you made, recall the influences (people, values, faith) and factors (thoughts, feelings, actions) that helped you in your decision.

\*As you think back on the moral choices and decisions you have made (both good & ones that proved unwise) how have you known that your decision was right or wrong? What criteria did you use to make a moral choice or decision? What thoughts or feelings or actions went into it?

