

Compassion and Loving-kindness

*Life is short and we have not too
much time for gladdening the
hearts of those who travel
the dark way with us.
O be swift to love!
make haste to be kind!*
--Henri F. Amiel

I've come to discover that Every season in our culture is "crazy-busy" for one reason or another. But at least Advent proclaims that this is a time to attend more deeply to others--to quiet ourselves, to be specially caring, to "gladden the hearts" around us, to offer acts of indiscriminate loving-kindness.

Activist and saint, Dorothy Day founded the Catholic Worker house in New York to give hospitality to the poor, the strange, the demented--the ignored of society. She wrote:

"A few years ago (in mid-1940's) I had to call in a woman doctor, an exile, who had been in the concentration camp in Germany for refusing to sterilize epileptic children. She was taking care of the women in the (CW) house. As she left she said, 'The only thing you can do for those sick and aged ones is to make them happy.' I have often thought of that since, when people have asked us about the work, what we were trying to do; it seemed very simple to say, '*We are trying to make people happy.*' Kindness seems a simple enough virtue, little of the heroic about it, and rather naïve and fatuous, not very much to the point these days when righteous wrath and grim fortitude seem to be more in order."

Yet, as she implies, kindness and compassion are exactly the "naïve" virtues our world cries for in every direction, then and now, near and far away. Compassionate oneness makes for peace. Who will gladden the "hearts of those who travel the dark way with us"?

"We have not too much time" so let us begin! It means first relaxing our own agendas and preoccupations and making room in our hearts that may feel too full of anxiety and responsibilities. But we can develop habits that help with compassionate seeing and will spill over into acts of loving-kindness instead of impatience or disregard. Here is one to begin with:

Meditation for Compassion We can do these meditations anywhere: at airports, waiting in lines, at church gatherings, in snarled traffic, at business meetings, whenever and wherever we are with people whether friends, estranged, or strangers.

With attention on another, pause reflectively: (Harry Palmer, quoted in Ode, June 2007)

- Step 1 "Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in his/her life."
- Step 2 "Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in his/her life,"
- Step 3 "Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness and despair."
- Step 4 "Just like me, this person is seeking to fill his/her needs."
- Step 5 "Just like me, this person is learning about life."

Send responses to: mbrownop@aol.com

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This year's Advent and Christmas daily reflections booklet is
DAYBREAKS by Paula D'Arcy. (\$1.25)

Paula's introduction is: "Everything Lies Before Me:

I was in Europe, leading a retreat in a lush vineyard on an Italian hillside. Each morning every man and woman attending the retreat gathered on the grass in a circle and spoke these words:

This is the day that lies before me.

These are the hours.

This is my life.

Sometimes now, when the day ahead of me is hectic, I walk outside my kitchen door or outside my hotel room and whisper the words again. They are a particularly meaningful prayer for Advent, when everything lies ahead.

Repeat them often, until you believe the deep truth they carry.