

**Fourth Sunday of Easter – Year C
(Apr. 21, 2013)**

Compassion

I want to talk today about compassion. It seems to be an almost forgotten virtue in our world today. Just this past week we were reminded of how cruel human beings can be to other human beings when two bombs exploded at the end of the Boston Marathon. The marathon was a joyous occasion bringing people together from all over the world for an event that celebrates the wonder of the physical strength and energy of the human body. It almost seems as though winning is a secondary issue since most of the hundreds of people who participate know they will not come in first or even second or third. It's the sheer joy of being there and doing it that are the most important. And yet that was all spoiled by a single act of cruelty.

We hear about incidents like this occurring on an almost daily basis somewhere in our world. We register the sheer horror of it all and we wonder why doesn't somebody do something about it? Or we throw up our hands in despair and think it's all just completely hopeless.

And yet, and yet, every once in a while someone comes along to remind us that there is still goodness in our world, that there is still compassion, and that someone is doing something about it. Someone is there doing his or her best to fill the void left by hatred with boundless love and compassion.

Think of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. All by herself she would go out on the streets of Calcutta and gather those who were dying and bring them to a place where they could die with dignity surrounded by love. It wasn't long before the world knew about her and came to join her in this extraordinary endeavor.

Or think of Fr. Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit from California, who has spent at least twenty years working with gangs in Los Angeles, a city that has been called the gang capital of the world. You may have heard him speak here a couple of weeks ago. It was an eloquent and moving witness to the power of boundless compassion. He has written a book called, *Tattoos on the Heart*, subtitled *The Power of Boundless Compassion*. It's not a "how-to"

book, you know: how to deal with gangs, how to get rid of gangs. No, it's simply a series of stories of his dealings with gang members who have been transformed, he would say, through the grace of God, but grace that works through the compassion that these young people experience for the first time in their lives.

On this fourth Sunday of Easter we think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In his life, death, and resurrection he has shown himself to be someone of boundless compassion, and when he tells his disciples to love one another as he has loved them, he is telling them to be compassionate, understanding, forgiving, loving people, just as he was. Last week we heard him ask Peter three times, "Do you love me?" And three times Peter said, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Then Jesus said, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." Be a shepherd to my people. Treat them as I have treated them. Nurture them, love them, show them understanding and compassion.

Mother Teresa and Fr. Greg Boyle both heard Jesus ask them that question, "Do you love me" and both answered, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." And you know Jesus asks each and every one of us the same thing. What will we answer? And what will we do when he tells us to feed his lambs and feed his sheep?