



“The Greatest Mark of God’s Love,” “Seeking the Grace of Compassion”

*This blog post from William Barry, SJ, is a reflection on David Fleming’s Book, “What is Ignatian Spirituality”, which Ignatian Volunteers are using for spiritual reflection in many regions this service year.*

Fittingly, this year we read these two chapters that focus on the third and fourth weeks of the Spiritual Exercises as we approach and live through Holy Week. Fleming rightly focuses on compassion for Jesus as the desire of the third week of the Exercises. Through the second week of the Exercises we have come to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more ardently and to follow him more closely. We have, it is hoped, become his friends. So we approach his passion and death with the desire to share our friend’s suffering, to be with him to the end. Love’s last service to the loved one is to want to be there with compassion for the other, in this case, for Jesus. When we pray to have compassion for Jesus, I believe, we are praying to be images of God *par excellence*. Let me explain.

In the Bible God is defined as love, but a love that shows itself in such an onrush of emotion that God is willing to risk self for the beloved. The Hebrew word for compassion, *rachamim*, has resonances with the Hebrew word for womb; compassion is “womb love,” the kind of love that moves a mother to sacrifice herself for the sake of her child. God risks self in the very act of creating us human beings because God creates us to be his images, his friends and stewards, in this world, and, of course, we have so often failed to live up to God’s expectations with terrible consequences for what God wants in creating us. But God never wavers in his love for us. In Jesus God takes the risk of becoming one of us and of being killed for his trouble in doing so. By his actions and words God promises to be with us through thick and thin, in good times and in bad, through joy suffering and pain, forever. In Jesus God shows us what it means to be a human being, an image of God.

If we love Jesus enough to stay with him through his suffering and death, sharing the pain and sorrow as best we can with compassion, then, in a sense, we are returning the favor God has shown us with his compassion for us. What a remarkable possibility is given us! And one that will also show itself in the way we are with the people we serve as Ignatian Volunteers.

*Fr. Bill Barry, SJ is a Spiritual Reflector for IVC New England. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1950 and was ordained in 1962. He earned a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Michigan in 1968. He has taught at the University of Michigan, Weston Jesuit School of Theology, and Boston College. Bill is the author or co-author of 20 books, including The Practice of Spiritual Direction, God and You, Finding God in All Things, Spiritual Direction and*

*the Encounter with God, Who Do You Say I Am?, Contemplatives in Action, and A Friendship like No Other. For more on his writing please visit [Loyola Press](#).*