**5 Easter 2025**

I spent a few days last week with my oldest daughter, Megan, and her three kids, Natalie, Henry and Chloe at their home in Falls Church, VA. Jude and Coco, their cats, were my alarm clock each morning. My son-in-law, Vince, is a Green Beret reservist and is in Belgium until next week. It rained pretty much the entire time, but that didn’t slow us down or dampen our spirits. As I made my way back home in the fog and the drizzle on Wednesday, I felt like I was floating through a sea of gratitude.

If you’re like me, you want your kids and grandkids to know deep love—a divine kind of love that goes beyond biological family. We want to teach our kids about God’s love. But what if kids have more to teach us about the compassionate nature of Christ than we realize? I know Anne experiences that every week leading our school kids in Godly Play, and often with a good dose of humor! By the age of three, children begin to show genuine compassion and empathy. Preschool kids can differentiate their feelings and experiences from those around them.

We hope as they grow, being empathetic and compassionate will become second nature. Those qualities are not natural and are often not rewarded in the dog-eat-dog world in which we live. We’re tempted to live for ourselves alone, forgetting that true love loves one’s neighbor as one’s self. Compassion keeps us tender to our own humanity and the humanity of our neighbors. The writer, Frederick Buechner said, “Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it’s like to live in someone else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.”

In various places in the gospels, Jesus calls his disciples and followers “little children.” This morning’s gospel from John’s Last Supper is one example. Jesus is not talking down to them, but reminding them that he is their loving brother and that they have a loving Father in heaven. In Aramaic one world for father is “abba” meaning papa or daddy. Jesus models compassion, empathy and humility for his friends, hoping it will rub off on them. He literally embraces that fatal capacity for feeling what it’s like to live in human flesh and blood. God with skin on. Love one another, as I have loved you. And the full measure of His love was about to be displayed through His death and Resurrection.

This is why Christianity, or the Way of Jesus, as the early Church was called, is **incarnational.** We don’t just believe that God is out there somewhere or even with us and around us, but that God gets inside of us through the Holy Spirit. He’s in the air we breathe and in the bread and wine we ingest. God in us. God for us. And God for others through us. There’s nothing like it and it’s pure gift. With God’s help we must wear compassion like a worn scarf knit together with love and intention and shared with whoever is cold. As the great Henri Nouwen has said, “Compassion is not just how we live, it is who we become.” Again, it’s about incarnating the love of God.

One of my favorite Crosby, Stills, and Nash songs is *Teach Your Children.* The gist of the song is that we must teach our children how to love, while remembering that they have a lot to teach us about how to love, if we’re open to it. This congregation used to have lots of children before Covid. Not so much now, but they’re slowly coming back as we nurture the spirit of compassion, mercy, grace and humility to one another and all those we come in contact with. It’s important to remember that we don’t grow the Church, but God does through us. It’s a crucial distinction. When our egos get out of the way God gently draws people to Himself and is glorified.

I’d like to close with this prayer:

*The Lord be with you.* And also with you. *Let us pray.*

*Compassionate Christ, we thank You for bridging the chasm between our broken hearts and our Father’s lovingkindness. In all we say, all we do, and all we are, help this parish family to be bathed in Your light so we might reflect your love.*

*Protect us from the hierarchies of the world that tell us to care only for ourselves or those with power and popularity. Keep our hearts tender so we may move toward our neighbors, especially the poor, extending care and pouring out the compassion we would want to receive.*

*Thank You, Lord, for the beautiful ways the youngest among us so often embody Your mercy and teach us how to live out your love. Help us to see how interconnected humanity is by growing in us an understanding of Your kingdom as kinship. Move us by Your Spirit to a future of mutuality, where compassion is freely given and freely received, where justice flows like a river. In the light of your Divine love, may this parish family and our diocese continue to grow, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.* **Amen.**