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God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die.

—John 3:16

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WEEK 12

## God's Compassion

### Missions Jesus

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#### Guide: With Jesus in His Mission

We have responded to the invitation of Jesus, the one who loves us. At some level we have expressed our desire to *be with* Jesus in his mission from God. Now we give ourselves over to the desires of this growing love-companionship relationship.

As we grow in love for someone—especially someone who has done so much for us—we experience a powerful desire not only to be *with* the one we love but also to know everything we can *about* that person. In the fascination of love we say that we can't get enough of the one we love.

For this week, and for the weeks ahead, our one desire is to come to know as much as we can about Jesus. Of course, this is not *head knowledge*. It's more the kind of discovery that leads to deeper feelings of intimacy and love, and deeper desires to be with him in his mission. *To know him more intimately that I might love him more deeply, that I might follow him more closely.*

In the early days of this retreat, we looked at our own story, through the imaginative exercise of looking through

the images in the *photo album* of our life. Now we ask Jesus to show us *his* photo album. In our desire to know more about him, we ask Jesus to show us *everything*—to tell us his story—that we might fall more deeply in love with the one we will come to know so intimately. The one who has invited us to be with him in his mission.

This week we start at the beginning. We imagine that in God's eternity, the Trinity of Persons in God looked down on human history and was filled with infinite compassion that missioned Jesus to save us. The incredible photo of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, can help us imagine the span of human history that evoked God's compassion. We know that that expression of love by God resulted in our salvation history—the preparation, the promises, the expectation, and finally the birth of Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection for us.

Let's use the helps this week to enter into the mystery of the Incarnation, the choice of God to redeem our world. We've reviewed all that sin and rebellion in our world has meant, including our personal sin. Now we imagine the response of God to the sin of the world—the missioning of Jesus. And let's begin to express our desire to know his origins that we might fall more deeply in love with him and be united with his mission, however he should choose to invite us to join him.

### Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

In everyday life, falling in love doesn't need much practical help for getting started. It seems to just happen. Falling in love seems easy. Upon reflection, however, falling in love does have some elements we can learn from in our desires for the weeks ahead. And, as we all know, sustaining a loving relationship that leads to self-sacrificing love takes a lot of fidelity.

Think about the experience of falling in love. What allows it to happen? What do we *do* in the earliest stages of falling

in love? Doesn't it *begin* with something we call a *connection*? Perhaps it's a connection with a total stranger. Something happens in our hearts that lifts our spirits. At the center of the *attraction* is a discovery of a *togetherness* in some way. We *connect*. From then on, the growing attraction is fed by a growing, sometimes insatiable desire to be *with* the one we love. Growing love feeds the desire for growing union—a desire for ways to be with the other in deeper and deeper ways. In the very beginning this may be quite unconscious, but before very long, we know we are in love. We start *acting on* that love. We think about, or daydream about, the other while doing all kinds of things. We call the other person more frequently and arrange to spend time together. We remember and replay our conversations. In the beginning, we talk about everything and anything. Nothing about the other person is boring. We want to know about all of the other's life experiences and choices, the other's likes and dislikes, and what makes the other the person he or she is. And at each new discovery, there is a deeper bonding. We look for ways to *express* our love, through tender words, through acts of caring, by going out of our way to help the other. Each expression deepens the love. We always remember the very first gestures of love. And the more the love grows, the more it will lead to some level of commitment—some need to guarantee that the loved one will always be in my life and some commitment to a self-giving offering of myself to the relationship.

If this fits your experience of falling in love in some way, or if it recalls what your experience was, then it will help in a practical way for the weeks ahead. We are in the process of falling in love with Jesus. We can let ourselves *feel* the growing attraction based on a connectedness. We can let ourselves *experience* our growing desire to be with Jesus—to ask questions, to express tender words, to spend more time together.

All this is practical help because it is not just an *intellectual exercise* to ask Jesus to show us his photo album. This is a

matter of the heart. By this time in the retreat, we are already deeply connected with Jesus. We now desire to let our relationship go deeper.

The first pages of Jesus' photo album take us back to the beginning and show us an imaginative scene of the community of the Trinity looking forward through human history and experiencing what we can call only heart-wrenching compassion.

Imagining God's compassion to send Jesus to our world, to our lives, can be a moving experience. Keep with it. The more we imagine the Sarajevo scenes into which God's compassion in Jesus reaches, the more we understand who Jesus is. Jesus is *for us* to a depth beyond our imagining. Jesus enters into our fleshness. Completely. Such vulnerability! In no aspect of my life am I ever alone.

Throughout this week, practice saying these words: "*Lord, help me to know you completely that I may love you more intimately, so that I may be with you more completely.*" Or you may want to sing the *Godspell* adaptation of these words of St. Ignatius: "Oh, dear Lord, three things I pray: to see thee more clearly; love thee more dearly; follow thee more nearly—day by day."

Each evening, before going to bed, for even a brief moment, I can ask what I ought to say to God, to Jesus. And, of course, I can feel and enjoy the inner delight of love growing and the attraction to more.

### For the Journey: God's Gestures

The power of attraction begins with our watching the gestures of another person. People reveal themselves with every physical movement of hands, face, legs, and the entire body itself. People are telling others about themselves without even knowing it, simply by how they walk or carry their purse or books. The more we are physical, the more we are available to being known. Through gestures, then, we move from mystery

into history. When we are invited in the Spiritual Exercises to contemplate the life of Jesus, we are urged to watch God move into our history by the physical actions or gestures of the God-made-man, Jesus.

God had made many attempts to attract our attention and response through the covenants with our Jewish ancestors. They were gestures that began, and continued through the centuries, this courtship with the human family. We now watch the increase of intensity with which Jesus comes calling. If suspicion needs distance, then our calculating selves need to allow him to perform his drama of gestures before our eyes and hearts. If prejudice needs the ignorance that distance provides, then we allow Jesus to properly inform our minds and wills so as to be in his troop.

### In These or Similar Words . . .

Dear Lord,

What is it like for you to look at the world you created? You see the beauty, the nature, people caring for each other, children being born. But there is the other side. I can't imagine how much evil you see. Children going hungry, dying in their mother's arms; weapons becoming more important than the people they were designed to protect; tired and lonely people wandering the streets, not only without a place to stay but also without dignity and respect.

From the comfort of my own safe and warm home, I look into the photo for this week. The bombed-out houses, the smoke rising, the small flowers left on the tree. It suddenly changes from yet another photo of a war zone to a real neighborhood. From these houses, people went to work, celebrated family events, talked about upcoming weddings and books, borrowed flour from their neighbors. Now it's gone, a smoky rubble.

How do you look down on such a world, where we are destroying one another's homes, pouring chemicals into the

waters, and valuing money and possessions more than each other? You must feel such great sadness inside. Your creations have forgotten you.

But in an incomprehensible act of love, your compassion moves you to give yourself so completely to the world you created. You express your love for us in a most unusual way—you become one of us. How could you love us that much? Knowing that it means pain and struggle and death?

Oh, Lord, teach me to love more. I beg you, please let me see and feel how you lived your life on earth. I want to know you even better and want to be with you in this world. I want to accept your invitation, to say yes to you. Now please let me become friends with you as you walk the earth. Let me learn from you, talk with you. Let me see how I can pattern my life after yours.

I am in awe at your love for us—for me. I don't have the words to express any of it except a paltry "thank you," which sounds so inadequate. Take my hand, Lord. Talk to me. Show me your photo album and your life. Help me to say yes every day.

### **Scripture Readings**

Ephesians 1:3–14

Colossians 1:9–22

John 1:1–18