



Novena of Grace 2021

Readings: Hosea 14: 2-10 | Psalm 81: 6c-11ab, 14 and 17 | Mark 12: 28-34

Grace: We pray for the grace to have compassion for our neighbors,
opening our hearts to loving them.

Day 4: “Open My Heart to God’s Love”

As we continue into Day 4 of this Novena of Grace, we reflect on the readings. In Hosea, we hear that “the ways of the Lord are right.” We understand that “those who are prudent know God” and “straight are the paths of the Lord.” There is no other God to worship.

In the Gospel of Mark, we learn that the most important commandment is to “Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second one is the greatest. Love your neighbor as yourself.” When Jesus saw that the scribe had answered wisely, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

What does it mean to not be far from the Kingdom?

This is how God’s kingdom comes into the world:

God’s love is freely and forever given...

We are to put God at the center of our relationships and be bearers of compassion to our brothers and sisters...

We are to imitate Jesus...

Let us reflect on our need for God’s love:

Seeking the good of others is the foundation of love...

Consuming our souls with kindness and compassion is another way we are getting close to the Kingdom...

Marshall Rosenberg wrote a book entitled *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* about a way of communicating that helps us live a life of compassion and love.



Novena of Grace 2021

Nonviolent communication operates on a couple of principles:

1. The greatest joy springs from connecting and contributing to our own and other's well-being. So "loving others as we love ourselves" speaks to the importance of self-love. And...
2. Love is more about what we do than what we feel.

This book came out of his attempt to understand love and how to manifest it. Essentially, giving of ourselves is the key to nonviolent communication. To give the gift of oneself is a true blessing.

Love your neighbor!!

Poet Gwendolyn Brooks says in her poem entitled *Paul Robeson*: "We are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond." Brooks' poem celebrates Robeson's life which calls upon people to be part of something bigger than themselves.

Nonviolent communication is a language that we adopted at my parish, St. Leo, as we created "Peace Pods" in which about five to ten parishioners read his book over a three year period. It reframed the way we express ourselves and listen to others.

Marshall Rosenberg created some metaphors and symbols to help us. He used the giraffe as the symbol of compassion. Why the giraffe?

It has the largest heart of every land mammal.

It has a long neck. This represents long ranging perspective, gives the advantage of seeing everything from above and the widest angle of vision of any animal. It can be objective and place things into a larger context. From this vantage point, there's no tunnel vision, and there's a vulnerability in sticking your neck out to connect.

Tongue. Giraffes have a strong and hard tongue with a texture that is similar to rubber or plastic, which means it can chew and digest stems and thorns and process the tough things in life. It means if we have the tongue of a giraffe we are able to "chew" aggressive words, destructive criticisms and insults and turn them into inoffensive "food" without causing harm or more precisely, understanding that they are the unmet needs and frustrations of the speaker.



Novena of Grace 2021

Then there is also a jackal, who speaks the language of demands that provoke defensiveness, resistance and counterattack. Jackals are low to the ground, run in packs and use punishing language.

Rosenberg uses these two mascots in his conferences and workshops as hand puppets and demonstrates how we are all called to be giraffes using compassion and empathy, both with ourselves and with others by echoing and being conscious of the feelings and needs of others. The main goal of being a giraffe is to connect with others empathetically and to understand.

God's calls us to love others as we love ourselves, being those giraffes of compassion toward each other.

As a teacher, I have witnessed many students struggling in this new academic environment on a screen in a Zoom landscape. Even as I try to sow into our young people, I find many are stuck in the throes of social isolation and anxiety in this new distance learning or hybrid situation. So as I see their faces glowing on my computer screen, I know that loving on them is the most important thing in our English class, Even while we unpack the literary meaning of the literature we read or we talk about crafting an effective paragraph in my Freshmen English class, I know that LOVING ON THEM and LOVING THEM is my most important instructional and divine task. My LOVE for them gets them across the finish line.

Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who made the decision in 2016 to sit and kneel during the playing of the national anthem, said, "I am kneeling for those oppressed." He says, "Love for my people fuels me." We protest because we love ourselves... and others."

It is the most important commandment. In loving, we are not far from the Kingdom of God.

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Day 4 | March 12, 2021

Reflection Questions: *How can we soften our hearts to be in relationship with others? How can we be like giraffes, demonstrating compassion to those around us?*