



A compassionate heart . . .

I'm writing on the afternoon of Good Friday, the most solemn day in the Christian year. It is the day on which Jesus was crucified, and is marked by very solemn, austere, ceremonies. And, for many folks, one of the conundrums about Good Friday is WHY a day an innocent man is killed is called "Good"? One of many answers is that, on this day, one person put aside his own well-being, indeed his life, for the sake of others. Jesus' offering of himself is understood, in Christian theology, as an incredible act of compassion. That would be . . . "Good".

Tomorrow, by a coincidence of the calendar, is observed among some Buddhists, particularly those in China and Vietnam, as a holy day related to compassion. Out of compassion for the unenlightened, *Bodhisattvas*--those individuals who have attained nirvana--refrain from entering nirvana until all suffering is ended for everyone. The Chinese depict this future Buddha (i.e., the

Bodhisattva) as Kwan Yin, a female dispensing compassion with a thousand arms. Tomorrow is Kwan Yin Day.

Compassion is central to the world's religious traditions, and it is no empty concept. While they come from the same linguistic root, "compassion" and "sympathy" and "empathy" have different meanings and different expectations. For example, "compassion" is used to translate a Greek word that has very visceral connotations: one's guts moved! And the response to compassion is almost always action. Jesus' act of compassion led him to give over his life for others. *Bodhisattvas*' compassion leads them to forgo bliss in order to give their lives in service of others.

Compassion comes from a heart broken open, one that sees great need and the suffering associated with that need. And, from that heart now open, action comes forth. The needs around us ARE great -- from the devastation of Haiti and Cuba, to the riots in Nigeria, to the extreme poverty in this wealthy country, to the horror of human trafficking, to our friends and family in sorrow or pain. If I pay attention, my heart breaks, my guts move. I cannot ignore it. I must act, even if in some small way, to relieve that suffering. It is a grateful response to those who, in the past, and in the future, give themselves up for me.

Blessings,

Gary

PS: To my Christian brothers and sisters, may you have a joyous Easter! To my Jewish brothers and sisters, may your observance of Passover continue to be meaningful. And, to all, honor Kwan Yin by doing something compassionate!