(Mt 11:25-30)

 **COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY**

In a Christian community, we gather in the name of Christ, and so we experience him in the midst of a suffering world. There, our minds, which cannot fully grasp the pains of the world, are transformed into the mind of Christ. Nothing that is human is alien to him.

In community, we are no longer helpless individuals, but we are transformed into one People of God. God’s unconditional love transforms our fears and anger, and we become gentle manifestations of his boundless compassion. Our lives become compassionate because in the way we live and work together, God’s compassion becomes present in the midst of a broken world.

The deepest meaning of the compassionate life is revealed here. By our life together, we become participants in the divine compassion. Through this participation, we can take on the yoke and burden of Christ - which is all human pain in every time and place - while realizing that his yoke is easy and his burden light (Mt 11:30).

As long as we depend on our own limited resources, the world will frighten us, and we will try to avoid the painful spots. But once we have become participants in God’s compassion, we can enter deeply into the most hidden corners of the world and perform the same works that Christ did. Jesus says that we may perform even greater works (Jn 14:12).

Wherever true Christian community is formed, compassion *happens* in the world. The energy that radiated from the early Christian communities continues to show itself wherever people come together in Christ’s name and take on his yoke in humbleness and gentleness of heart (Mt 11:29). It is divine energy that has a transforming influence on all who are touched by it.

This is true not only of Francis and Clare and their brothers and sisters, but also whenever people let go of their old, anxious ways of thinking and find one another in the mind of Christ.

It is in community that God’s compassion reveals itself. Solidarity, servanthood, and obedience are the main characteristics of our life together.

Solidarity can hardly be an individual accomplishment. It is difficult for us as individuals to enter into the pains and sufferings of our fellow human beings. But in the community gathered in Christ’s name, there is an unlimited space into which strangers from various places with vastly different stories can enter and experience God’s compassionate presence.

It is a great mystery that compassion often becomes real for people not simply because of the deeds of one hospitable individual, but because of an intangible atmosphere resulting from a life in community.

(Adapted from *Compassion*, Henri Nouwen.)