

The Compassion of Christ

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[I]n learning to love everyone we have to withdraw our abstractions. We have to withdraw our statistical mind which is often the way we treat the suffering of others. . . . Learning to love means being able to see every member of humanity as a unique individual. It is here that we come to the great difference between compassion and pity. Pity is when we love someone who is suffering but when the love is still embedded in our own fear. When we see the suffering of another, when we see somebody dying for example, we cannot help but fear our own death; and if we are controlled by that fear, even unconsciously, we pity the person who is dying. “Poor thing,” we say. (“Thank God it’s not me,” we think.) But when our love meets the suffering of the other and breaks through our own egocentric fear, we no longer think of the other as a “poor thing”: we think of them as a person like ourselves. They are not separate from us. The meaning of compassion is that we recognize that we mourn with those who mourn, we die with those who die, we suffer with those who suffer. This is the compassion of Christ which has united all humanity in himself. “When you gave a glass of water to the thirsty, you gave it to me. . . . What you did to the least of my little ones, you did to me.”

After meditation: “Mimesis” by Fady Joudah in POETRY OF PRESENCE ed. Phyllis Cole-Dai and Ruby R. Wilson (West Hartford, CT: Grayson Books, 2017), p. 192.

Mimesis

My daughter

wouldn't hurt a spider

That had nested

Between her bicycle handles

For two weeks

She waited

Until it left of its own accord

If you tear down the web I said

It will simply know

This isn't a place to call home

And you'd get to go biking

She said that's how others

Become refugees isn't it?

Fady Joudah was born in Texas to Palestinian refugees. He grew up in Libya and Saudi Arabia before returning to the U.S. to study medicine. In addition to writing poetry, he is an emergency room physician in Houston, TX and volunteers for Doctors Without Borders.