

Along the track

Kindness

My little granddaughter brought me a baby skink today. They are all over the place at the moment, taking advantage of the last rays of sunshine before winter. If it wasn't dead then it was very, very close to it or doing a very good job of acting but 'no', we had to look after it and find a warm place in one of the pot plants and find something for it to eat. We spent quite some time beside the pot plant while she sang one or two songs to comfort it.

We don't hear the word kindness much these days. It's still around, I think but not as much as it used to be. Occasionally we read a story about it in the newspaper, which means it is pretty rare if it is considered 'newsworthy.' Are we too busy perhaps? Too intent on getting things done, too focused on 'outcomes'?

What is kindness anyway? Perhaps we may think of it or try to define through the memories of unkindness in our own lives, when we were treated unkindly at school, bullied even, or when those we thought friends made fun of us or treated us with rejection or scorn. When that happens as adults, it can be especially hurtful. In those moments we can feel isolated, hurt and, for some strange reason, even shame as if it is our fault.

Kindness begins in the mind. How we think about others precedes how we act toward them. If we like them it is easier. If we don't, it is a bigger challenge but no less important.

St Luke wrote: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them."

Kindness brings out what is best in us. It asks us to be generous, patient, thoughtful, forgiving, sensitive to the needs of others, accepting of others even though at times we may find that hard. The kindest things we may have to do is to find ways to challenge their behaviour. How we do that is also a challenge but it may be the greatest gift of kindness we may offer, not out of a sense of superiority, the "I know best" mentality but rather letting them know that what you have done is hurtful and even destructive.

But it can be a surprise how one touch of kindness can bring out our own desire to be kinder and vice versa. It can be contagious. I saw a sign on a shop window "If you want others to be happy, practice kindness. If you want to be happy, practice kindness"

Even the smallest acts of kindness can make a difference. It can make a bad day feel brighter, it can help us face a difficult situation, it can make another feel that someone cares. Kindness can help one who is suffering through an illness, it can make an angry person think again. Giving someone a moment of your time could be just what he or she needs, a thoughtful gesture can change the way someone will act towards others today.

If kindness begins in the mind and if it begins with how we think about others, then how we talk about them and to them is also important. Pope Francis wrote that "Kindness is firm and persevering intention to always will the good of others, even the unfriendly." It is also about a determined effort to find the good in others rather than finding fault.

When we read the Gospels there are many examples of kindness in the way Jesus treated people, not just in his healing and forgiving but in the simple gestures of taking people by the hand, embracing those considered outcasts, in the way he spoke to people and so on. But we don't often note how Jesus was also appreciative of the kindness of others toward him – the woman who anointed him, Veronica who wiped his face with the towel, the hospitality of Martha and Mary, the leper who came back to thank him, just to mention a few. One of his most memorable stories is about kindness, the Good Samaritan parable.

Are you saddened to read the signs that say things like aggression, anger and threatening behaviour or violence will not be tolerated here and these signs are displayed in places like hospitals or surgeries or places that offer help. How sad is that! How have we come to this? Do they provoke you to do the opposite, to say a kind word, to offer a word of thanks, to be patient and cheerful? Even the smallest gesture can make a difference. We change the world in small steps.

Kindness can be very powerful.

Regards
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