The quality of mercy is not strained

By Chaplain Norbert J Karava

In a world abounding with hurtful things, some natural, others more numerous and generally more lethal, man-made, worth their weight in gold, are those, it seems, relatively few people who are animated with the passion of mercy itself. The passion of mercy, I opine, is the most sublime expression of love, and begins with humble mammal-based psychology in two dimensions, empathy and sympathy. To be sure, however, it does not end there!

Empathy is our ability to allow ourselves to experience what the victim experiences. It is passive in nature: Persons have the unique and yes, mysterious ability to engage other persons in such a way that what happened to the victim-person "happens" to them, not directly, but then, not merely virtually either. The more perfect our empathy is, the more the victim's pain becomes our pain.

Sympathy is our ability to have the same emotional response to the same painful circumstance as the victim. Sympathy is active in nature. Thus we can emote and resonate the grief of a child having just lost its mother in a Guatemalan village, even though, just having arrived there, we know neither the little boy, nor knew his mother. The very commonality of the emotion is captured and communicated in troubled brows and teary eyes.

Both empathy and sympathy allow us to do what is at the heart of providing psychological shelter for the victim, and that is, "being together with." We cannot make the catastrophe "not happen" nor, most often, can we cause the pain to cease; we can choose to be with the victim, but we cannot do this in any meaningful way without empathy and sympathy.

But are we capable of empathy or sympathy? We cannot be with the victim while at a comfortable distance, from a position of strength or preoccupied with our own agenda of needs and wants, nor all the more, having any designs of exploitation. We can become so conditioned by patterns of selfishness, sexual promiscuity, consumption, self-indulgence and self-absorption that we are no longer capable of passion in the proper sense of the word, as true empathy or sympathy. I argue that the man who gorges himself on internet pornography eventually loses his ability to empathize or sympathize at all. Being hungry is not the same thing as being truly passionate. Lust here – mercy there, you choose.

What is left? Without empathy and sympathy, the victim becomes a mere target of a procedure, medical, psychological, pedagogical, administrative or even religious. In this sort of context, things become very, very "professional." The tawdry shabbiness of lovelessness puts on the clinical smock of professionalism. If you have ever been such a target, or object of mere professional skills and attention, medical or all the more so, clerical, you know how degrading and alienating it is. We wonder which is worse, the problem or the cure?

And then there is counterfeit empathy and, even worse, affected sympathy, the most blatantly obvious of caricatures. We can often find this as one of the services rendered at the funeral parlor, along with the canned music and asphyxiating perfume of lilies.

It becomes clear that there is something else, outside the psychological domain of empathy and sympathy that animates and elevates them to something entirely more sublime, causing them to become the passion of mercy: It is the rational will, in a revolutionary act, turning away from "what I need-what I want" in a moment of madness, expressible in these or similar words: "I don't care what happens to me or how I feel" and turning towards the good of another person sojourning in this lonely universe.

What began as a mere psychological refuge becomes a moment of personal communion. And when that happens, even though the heavens themselves are falling… somehow, everything is okay, and that strange and wonderful scent that lingers? Ah, we call it "immortality."

Seat belts are saving lives

From CFAY Traffic Safety Office

Do you know the seat belt usage rate here on Yokosuka base? Currently the usage rate is 92 percent which is under what other bases in the region are reporting.

How does this make you feel when you hear the rate; do you think people not wearing their belt are concerned for your safety if they are not concerned for their own?

Working in today's safety minded organizations, nobody would agree this percentage is good enough. We must raise the usage rate! By reeducating on how to use your seatbelt, maybe we can get our usage rate back up.

Today's vehicles are equipped with a variety of safety devices such as horns, stop lights, head lights, anti-lock brake system (ABS), airbags, accelerators (yes, the accelerator) and even more. This time we would like to focus on the most effective and easiest to use device - seat belts.

Your seat belt functions perfectly but only when it is properly used.

The lap belt portion of the seat belt should be positioned across the hips to maximize protection against injuries. If your vehicle is equipped with one, adjust the height of the shoulder belt anchor properly. Keep the shoulder strap snug across your chest and cross your collarbone. Never tuck it behind your shoulder; you might as well not wear it at all if you're going to do that. Also, you can severely injure your neck, ribs, spleen and liver if you're in an accident.

Be sure to position your head restraint at the proper height which is centered on the back of your head.

Always make sure children are properly restrained in the safest position. It should be noted that children under the age of 12 could be killed or seriously injured by a front impact airbag. That's why it is so important that children 12 and under sit in the back seat.

For infants and people under four feet, nine inches, they should be in a child seat or booster seat for their appropriate size and weight.

In any collision, there are actually three separate collisions:

- The vehicle collides with an object.
- The body collides with the vehicle's interior surfaces.
- The body's internal organs collide with bones and other tissue.

Even airbags, the most modern device, do not replace safety belts. Occupants must wear their belts regardless of whether a vehicle is equipped with airbags. Having an airbag is not an excuse for not wearing a seatbelt. It is only a supplemental feature of safety that works well in combination with seat belts.

Some newer model vehicles come with seat belt pretensioning devices and airbag systems may not activate unless the seat belt is properly buckled.

People are 25 times more likely to be injured or killed when thrown from a vehicle during a collision. Some believe seat belts won't allow them to escape from a vehicle that is under water or on fire… not true! People who don't escape are normally unconscious which prevents them for any type of actions for self preservation.

Rely on the most common and important safety device - SEAT BELTS.

Pet of the Week

The Pet of the Week this week is Dee Dee. She looks like an American Curl, with a lovely gray and white coat. Dee Dee is currently living with a dog, a cat and young children in a foster home. She is doing great and would probably flourish in a similar home as long as she has space to be by herself sometimes. Dee Dee has been with us for a long time, waiting for just the right family. Maybe it's you? To find out more about Dee Dee or any animal at Pets Are Worth Saving (P.A.W.S.), contact them at 243-9996, by e-mail to usskittytalk.yokosuka@gmail.com or visit the P.A.W.S. website at www.pawsyokosukajapan.com.

Photo courtesy of P.A.W.S.