

The auditorium erupted with thunderous applause. Msgr. O'Malley had just finished giving his final scripture speech. The text was ... the opening line of today's Gospel. "At the sight of the crowds, troubled and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd, the heart of Jesus was moved with pity for them."

"Observe well the Greek word that describes what happened inside the heart of Jesus," he'd been saying. "When that heart observed the condition of the crowds it went through *splanchnizosis*. *Splanchnizosis* means a reaction so strong it's physical ... a twisting of guts and intestines. The compassion of Jesus for us is so strong when he looks at us his heart feels this sinking, knotting, twisting, constricting the psychosomatic symptoms are so powerful they can produce discomfort, sickness, perhaps even death."

An hour or so after, Fr. O'Malley was back at the hotel, drifting off to sleep in a strange bed, wondering if he'd ever had a feeling of compassion that strong for anyone. Physical, visceral. He'd had anger so strong his abdomen and whole upper torso had stiffened. And dismay over injustice that had literally made him sick to his stomach.

But compassion that strong? Not that he could think of. Which made him feel sad, but then sleep came and he was OK. Then Jesus came to him in a dream, and that was really OK.

He found himself staring at the opened heart of Jesus, seeing inside to the tortured fibers and twisting flesh. There it was --- *Splanchnizosis*. The heart of Jesus felt so bad for sinners it was literally convulsed and shaking over them, over him.

The two made eye contact.

"Ah, Lord, forgive me. I don't deserve so much love. My own heart is egotistical, vain, petty, thick. I've seen suffering, but maybe too much of it. News about flood victims and fire victims and earthquake victims, or shoot-out victims in the street --- well, I just turn the page now. I don't want to feel sorrow. Maybe I can't feel sorrow."

He was waiting for the rebuke he knew he had coming. But what came was something else. "Patrick, I know you, and your heart, very well. And I love you. You can see, can't you, how much my heart loves you. But I don't blame you if you can't love me or others the same way. You're a child of Adam, and you've grown up damaged: raised by damaged parents, in school with damaged classmates, taught by damaged teachers, part of a damaged church in a damaged town in a damaged nation in a damaged world. It's original sin.

"But you've also been baptized. My spirit is inside. You may not feel perfect compassion for others, or any ... but I know you can look and feel at least some compassion for me. And feeling compassion for me, will motivate you to act, maybe often without much feeling, with compassion towards others. Compassion must be your choice. Try to make compassionate choices even though your heart doesn't feel compassion. That will be enough for now ... until death comes and makes you perfect.