

Friday Grind #549 *Tenderness* -July 24, 2026

Sometimes I come across a phrase that stops me in my tracks. It's a phrase I find startling, intriguing, seemingly contradictory, but definitely worth pondering. One such phrase came from Pope Francis when, in 2017, he made a surprise appearance at a TED conference and called for a "revolution of tenderness." He cited Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the type of tenderness he was talking about.

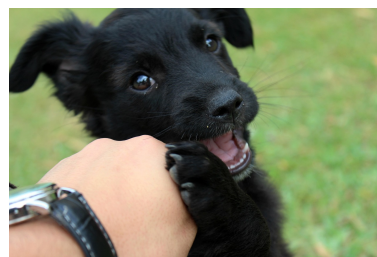
Pope Francis said our contemporary technological and consumerist culture leaves behind "thousands of human beings, or entire populations, on the side of the road." He exclaimed, "How wonderful would it be, while we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters orbiting around us." He added, "And what is tenderness? It is the LOVE that COMES CLOSE and BECOMES REAL. It is a movement that starts from our HEART and reaches the EYES, the EARS, and the HANDS." He added, "Tenderness is not weakness, it is fortitude."



Pope Francis blessing children... (photo by Pixabay)

These words raised a couple of questions for me: How can I join this revolution of tenderness? What small, daily things can I do to follow the example of that Good Samaritan whose love was *close* and *real*? Here are a few suggestions focused on those four words *heart, eyes, ears, hands*.

Heart: We can nourish tenderness within ourselves by fighting against the natural tendency to shield ourselves from pain and sorrow, to run away from all "bad news," or to harden our hearts to the suffering of others. Instead, we can intentionally and regularly expose ourselves to things, people, and experiences that tend to arouse our tenderness: holding an infant, playing with a child, caring for a garden, doing a small favor for someone, baking a special dessert, helping an elderly neighbor, playing with our cat or dog, watching a movie that might bring tears to our eyes, or listening to music that feeds our "softer side."



Eyes: We can look into people's eyes when we're talking with them—people such as the check-out clerk, the receptionist, the security worker, the

person who takes our order at the fast food place, the person cleaning the public restroom—or anyone else who is “orbiting around us.” Every day we can look for people around us doing a good, right, or generous thing. We can intentionally watch or read the news to expose ourselves to what is happening in the larger world—even the heart-wrenching stories we might prefer to avoid.

Ears. We can practice the art of *really* listening to the people we encounter in an ordinary day: our spouse and family members, our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends, our boss, the people we are “in charge of,” the people who may be “in charge” of us, the pastor giving his/her sermon, the clients we serve, the child who keeps asking questions, the person we find annoying or hard to listen to. As I’ve quoted before, listening is so much like loving, it is hard to tell the difference.

Hands. We can take an inventory of what we do with our hands on a typical day. Do we “lend a hand” to someone? Do we open a door for someone or hold a door open for the person behind us? Do we offer to carry something for someone who is struggling? Do we wave to a neighbor? Do we type an email to a congress member about an issue we feel passionate about? Do we cook supper, care for a child, wipe away the tears of someone who mourns, hold the hand of someone who is afraid, crochet baby blankets or prayer shawls for people we’ll never meet, serve a meal at a welcome

center, coach a kids soccer team, fold our hands in prayer everyday for our brothers and sisters in need?

One psychologist said that the true hallmark of human maturity is tenderness. Would that more of us all over the world would join in this revolution of tenderness, a revolution of small daily acts of love that “come close and become real.”



May our daily loving acts be “close and real”...

For reflection:

What are some of the things, people, or experiences that help to arouse tenderness within you?

Do you remember being the recipient of the tenderness of another person—a parent, grandparent, teacher, coach, priest, friend, stranger? What effect did their tenderness have on you?

Who helped teach you to be tender? How did they help you?

Some people say tenderness is a “feminine virtue.” To what extent do you agree or disagree—and why?

What are some of the stories in the gospel that show the tenderness of Jesus?