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"There was pity in his eyes rather than wrath."

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The Dunadin
Rings

A Monthly Reflection on Tolkien's *Lord of the*

Bilbo did not have a monopoly on Pity. Frodo learned to show Pity to Smeagol. However, especially noteworthy for Mercy or Pity is the heir of Isildur, the Dunadein himself, Aragorn son of Arathorn.

As the men of Gondor and Rohan are making their way to Mordor in order to distract the Eye of Sauron from the activities of Frodo and Samwise on Mount Doom, some of the young recruits get "cold feet" in light of facing an overwhelming battle of arms against an Enemy given over totally to evil. Instead of becoming angry with them, Aragorn shows them pity and allows them to return home with manly dignity. Here follows Tolkien's moving account in all its beauty and simplicity and majesty.

Aragorn looked at them, and there was pity in his eyes rather than wrath; for these were young men from Rohan, from Westfold far away, or husbandmen from Lassarnach, and to them Mordor had been from childhood a name of evil, and yet unreal, a legend that had no part in their simple life, and now they walked like men in a hideous dream made true, and they understood not this war nor why fate should lead them to such a pass.

"Go!" said Aragorn. "But keep what honor you may, and do not run! And there is a task which you may attempt and so be not wholly ashamed. Take your way south-west until you come to Cair Andros, and if that is still held by enemies, as I think, retake it, if you can; and hold it to the last in defence of Gondor and Rohan!"

Then some being shamed by his mercy overcame their fear and went on, and the others took new hope, hearing of a manful deed within their measure that they could turn to, and they departed.¹

Thus the Chief of the Dunadein offered these Men mercy, hope, and a chance to be truly courageous Men. This is the stuff of which kings are made!

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983) 169.