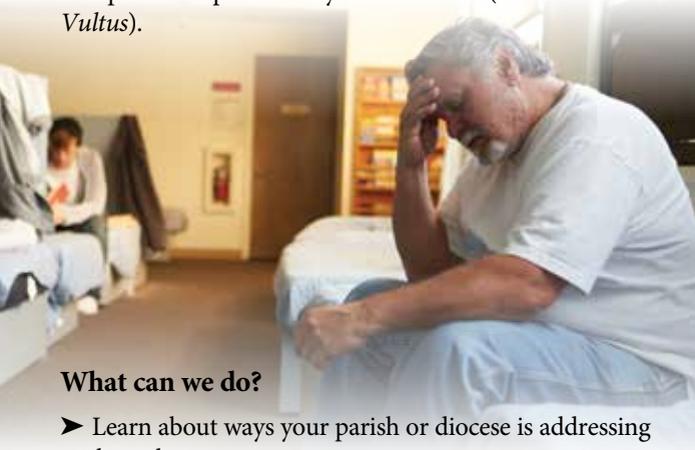


Shelter the homeless

“There was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

Images of people displaced by war, persecution, or a confluence of hardships fill the media. We need not look further than our inner cities to encounter the homeless. When we are tempted to judge them, let us remember that judgment belongs to God. Our role is to make God’s love present in the world through our words and deeds. Pope Francis reminds us that “the rule of life for Jesus’ disciples must place mercy at the center” (*Misericordiae Vultus*).



What can we do?

- Learn about ways your parish or diocese is addressing homelessness.
- Volunteer at a shelter and get to know the people and their stories.
- Support programs, like Habitat for Humanity, that build affordable housing.

Visit the sick and the imprisoned, comfort the afflicted

“For I was...ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.” (Matthew 25:36)

These works of mercy draw attention to caring for members of our communities who are not visibly present, who might be otherwise forgotten. Perhaps the most needed gift in our time is being present to others. Curing might be beyond our ability, but offering companionship is not. Let us listen and respond to the cry of the sick, the imprisoned, and the afflicted: “Do not forget us!”

For Reflection

How does your parish or diocese care for the sick, the imprisoned, and the afflicted? How can you be part of these efforts?



Bury the dead, pray for the living and the dead

“This is how you are to pray.” (Matthew 6:9)

The Church teaches us that dying is to be born to eternal life. Meditating on this teaching might help us feel more comfortable with being with those who mourn and with attending a funeral service. Our presence at a funeral signals our care and acknowledges and honors the innate dignity of the person who died. Praying the Litany of the Saints reminds us that the Communion of Saints includes all the living and departed faithful.

For Reflection

What are some ways you might support your parish’s efforts in caring for families in grief?

Forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently

“How often should I forgive?” (Matthew 18:21)

When we are secure in God’s unconditional love for us, when we are secure in our status as beloved, it is easier to let go of hurt and bear wrongs. We still feel the pain of hurt, and the bruise left by the wrong committed against us will take time to fade, yet knowing who we are and whose we are frees us from the chains of seeking retribution and enlarges our own heart to allow love, compassion, forgiveness, and mercy to take up residence.

For Reflection

Are there wrongs that you have been unable to forgive? Are you ready to have a change of heart? How does your parish community give witness to God’s forgiveness?

Additional Resources

Books

A Year of Mercy With Pope Francis: Daily Reflections, Ed. Kevin Cotter (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

Working for a Better World, Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo (Our Sunday Visitor, 2015).

By the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization and published by Our Sunday Visitor:

Celebrating Mercy
Confession: The Sacrament of Mercy
The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy
Mercy in the Fathers of the Church
Mercy in the Teachings of the Popes
The Parables of Mercy
The Psalms of Mercy
The Saints in Mercy

Website

Misericordiae Vultus (Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy), Pope Francis, w2.vatican.va

Our Sunday Visitor is the largest English-language Catholic publishing company in the world. Come to osv.com with all your Catholic questions, concerns, and needs.

OurSundayVisitor

Bringing Your Catholic Faith to Life

1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

By Agnes Kovacs

Copyright © by Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.
No part of this pamphlet may be reprinted or reproduced in any form.

Inventory No. P1780

Nihil Obstat: Msgr. Michael Heintz, Ph.D.

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: ✠ Kevin C. Rhoades
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend



9 781681 920238

The Works of Mercy

Bearing Witness to Christ

For Review Only. Copyright Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

For Review Only. Copyright Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis invites us “to become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives.” One way to respond to that invitation is to practice the works of mercy. The Holy Father reminds us,

“We are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us” (*Misericordiae Vultus*). Indeed, the source of mercy is God.

Traditionally, Catholic teaching has categorized the works of mercy as **corporal**, those addressing physical and material needs, and **spiritual**, those focusing on the spiritual and emotional needs of our neighbors. In day-to-day life, there isn’t such a well-defined separation between corporal and spiritual works of mercy: surely the kindness that prompts us to offer

a drink to the thirsty touches the other emotionally and spiritually as well. At the same time, comforting the afflicted might actually require us to take care of some physical or material need of our neighbor.



Corporal Works of Mercy

- feed the hungry
- give drink to the thirsty
- clothe the naked
- shelter the homeless
- visit the sick
- visit the imprisoned
- bury the dead



Spiritual Works of Mercy

- counsel the doubtful
- instruct the ignorant
- admonish sinners
- comfort the afflicted
- forgive offenses
- bear wrongs patiently
- pray for the living and the dead



Feed the hungry

The Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-8)

For many people around the globe, hunger is an ever-present reality of life. We do not have to travel to Asia, Africa, or South America to find people who do not know from where the next meal will come. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2014 members of 6.9 million households in the United States did not have adequate food at times.

What can we do?

- Make it a priority to not waste food; portion out smaller servings and be creative in using leftovers.
- Get involved locally by donating to or volunteering at the local food bank or soup kitchen.
- Support charitable organizations that work toward alleviating hunger by both directly supplying food and helping the poor gain tools, skills, and resources to be able to produce their own food.

Instruct the ignorant

“One does not live by bread alone.” (Matthew 4:4)

Education is often the key that unlocks the prison cell of poverty, whether we talk about mastering reading, writing, and math skills, or about our faith. Spiritual poverty is soul-crushing because it diminishes the religious imagination, which is necessary for living in Christian hope.

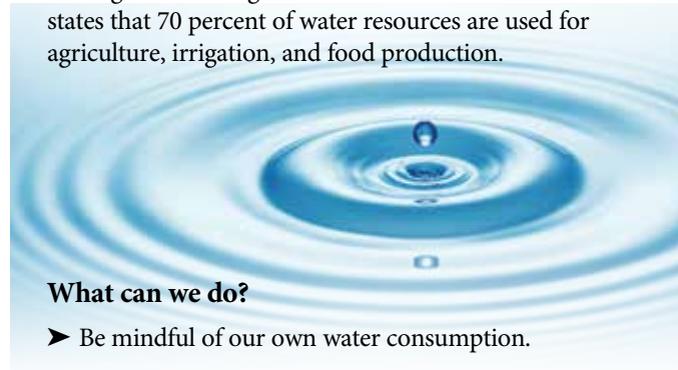
For Reflection

In what ways do you instruct others? Our parishes offer many opportunities such as volunteering as a catechist or RCIA sponsor. If teaching is not your personal calling, how might you still support educational efforts in your parish or community?

Give drink to the thirsty

The Woman at the Well (John 4:4-26)

Water that is suitable for human consumption is a precious commodity. According to a World Health Organization and UNICEF report, 663 million people in the world do not have access to clean water, and more than 300 million people in Africa live in a water-scarce environment. Women and children spend 125 million hours each day collecting water. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states that 70 percent of water resources are used for agriculture, irrigation, and food production.



What can we do?

- Be mindful of our own water consumption.
- Support organizations, like Water with Blessings, who equip, empower, and entrust mothers as agents of clean water in their own communities.
- Advocate for safekeeping forests, wetlands, and grasslands — nature’s water filters — so our water sources may remain healthy and clean.

Admonish sinners

“For as you judge, so will you be judged.” (Matthew 7:2)

Christ is our model for admonishing sinners. Throughout the Gospels he reminds people how to follow the path of righteousness and “go and sin no more.” At the same time, Jesus warns religious leaders about putting heavy burdens on others while not lifting a finger to help (see Luke 11:46). So when we think about admonishing sinners, we need to keep in mind the way Jesus confronted sin and dealt with sinners — frequently employing parables and questions to engage people, with gentleness and conviction rather than finger wagging, with great credibility, and from the authenticity of an integrated life.

For Reflection

Who helps you to spot the plank in your own eye? How does your life call others to the way of Christ?

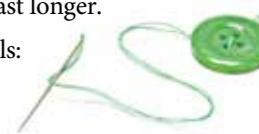
Clothe the naked

“I was...naked and you clothed me.” (Matthew 25:36)

Our closets are overflowing; we rent storage units to keep more of the stuff we’ve acquired. Some estimates state that most of us use only about 20 percent of the clothes in our closet. Much of our clothing is created in developing countries. The textile industry in these countries employs mostly children and women who often work long hours under difficult circumstances.

What can we do?

- Care for our clothes so they may last longer.
- Teach children basic mending skills: how to sew back a button, sew together a seam, or adjust a hem.
- Support the local charitable store by donating clothing in good condition or by shopping there (don’t forget business attire).



Counsel the doubtful

“This saying is hard; who can accept it?” (John 6:60)

Some people might feel that there is no room for questioning, for turning over a thorny issue of faith, so they walk away. Yet, a mature Christian is one who has wrestled with doubt, who has questioned, and emerged with deeply planted, well-rooted faith as a result. To show mercy is to create space and time to wrestle together but also to reassure and provide advice from our own experience: to lend an ear and to offer insight and care. The most powerful counsel any Christian can give is to bear witness to the joy of the Gospel by sharing God’s presence and workings in one’s life.



For Reflection

Who helped you with your questions of faith? How can you be present to others who need counsel?