Study Guide

The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

Introduction

The “great river of mercy,” as Pope Francis calls it in Misericordia Vultus, his introduction to the Jubilee Year of Mercy, “never runs dry” because there are always those who are willing to perform acts of mercy in their everyday lives. In The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, one of the official catechetical texts for the Year of Mercy, the concept of mercy as revealed in both the Old and New Testament is explored. The development of theology behind works of mercy, as expressed by the early Church fathers, is also examined as a base for in-depth reflections on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, their role in the life of the Church and in the lives of individual believers. We encourage you to use this text as a way of living out Pope Francis’s call to “become strong in the faith in Jesus Christ.”

Reflection Questions:

1. Which of the works of mercy is the easiest for you to do? Which is the hardest?

2. Jesus said that the way we treat others will be the standard by which we ourselves will be judged (Mt 25: 31-45). If you were to be judged today, what would Jesus find in your life? What can you do to change?

3. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that “giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity.” How much do you give to the poor? Could you give more, perhaps even consider tithing?

4. The word for mercy in Latin is misericordia, from the words for misery and heart. It might be defined as “compassion with the pity that it entails and fidelity with love as a requirement.” How does this definition of mercy fit with your own experiences of both giving and receiving mercy?
5. Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” How merciful are you? Could you be more merciful?

6. Look at some of the Psalms that plea for mercy. (Ps 4:2; 6:3; 9:14; 25:16; 51:1). Use these as the basis for creating your own prayer for mercy.

Process Activity:

Read aloud the twenty “good works” that Hermas lists (p. 29). Discuss in your group how these relate to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. How are they similar? How do they differ? One of the biggest issues facing the world today is the migrant crisis. One of the works of mercy is to “welcome the stranger.” How can we balance welcoming strangers (refugees) and protecting our country from invasion and harm?

Prayer:

Merciful God, your mercy is inexhaustible. Help us to extend your mercy to those around us through the corporal and spiritual acts of mercy. May be always be willing to do the good that is before us. Help us always to be witnesses of your mercy in our words and in our deeds. May we pay special attention to those who are poor or vulnerable, sick or lonely, or marginalized. And may we also never forget to be merciful with family members and others who are closest to us. Amen