

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s Mercy. ... At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives. For this reason, I have proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”¹ With these words, Pope Francis proclaims this upcoming year as the year of Mercy.

Beginning on the 8 of December 2015 and concluding on the Holy Solemnity of Christ the King the following year, the year of mercy will provide opportunities for all to discover the rich depths of the Father’s mercy. Many are the ways that the faithful are exhorted to experience the year of Mercy; pilgrimages, experiences of Confession, a “24 hours for the Lord” initiative during Lent, the ability to receive a jubilee year indulgence, and a focus on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The purpose of this article is to focus on the many facets through which the corporal and spiritual works of mercy may be taught and experienced within a parish setting.

I. OVERVIEW

Pope Francis clearly speaks of the importance of understanding these works of mercy but also implementing them into our daily lives. He states in the bull establishing the Jubilee year of Mercy, “It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.” Then, in his letter regarding the indulgences for the extraordinary jubilee year of mercy, Pope Francis states, “I have asked the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence.”²

“The *Works of Mercy* are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities.”³ In the Christian Tradition, fourteen particular actions are listed as works of Mercy. The Spiritual Works of mercy come from a variety of texts within the Gospel and the Corporal Works for mercy comes from the 25th chapter of Mathew.

The 7 Spiritual Works of Mercy consists of the following:

- Admonishing the sinner
- Instructing the ignorant
- Advising the doubtful
- Consoling the Sorrowful
- Bearing wrongs patiently
- Forgiving all injuries

¹ *Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy

² Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis according to which an indulgence is Granted to the Faithful on the occasion of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church #2447

- Praying for the living and the dead

The Seven Corporal Works of Mercy are comprised of the following:

- Feed the Hungry
- Give Drink to the Thirsty
- Clothe the Naked
- Shelter the Homeless
- Visit the Sick
- Visit the Imprisoned
- Bury the Dead

These fourteen works of Mercy are the fulfillment of the Christian expression of love. Indeed Jesus Christ teaches in the twenty-fifth chapter of Mathew that when we do these works, “in each of these ‘little ones,’ Christ himself is present.”⁴

II. TRADITIONAL MEANS OF CATECHESIS IN PARISH

For many Catholics, the works of mercy remain hidden within the reservoir of memory. Thus, in order for Catholics to live out Pope Francis’ desire for this Jubilee year and reflect on the august nature of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, every font through which the Church can teach the importance of the works of mercy should be implemented.

Homily: Traditionally, one of the most important fonts for teaching is found within the homily during Sunday Mass. Although the homily is primarily meant to elucidate the liturgy of the day and to bring about an encounter with God, it does contain a catechetical nature.⁵ Within the homilies, the Works of Mercy could be discussed. Indeed, these homilies could be thematic homilies and even run several in succession. One suggestion could be to hold three successive homilies: the first on the nature of mercy, the second on the spiritual works of mercy, and the third on the corporal works of mercy.

Religious Education Classes: Within the faith formation classes of the parish, considerable effort can be made to teach the spiritual and corporal works of mercy during this year of mercy. a class could be devoted each to the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Or a work of mercy could be a theme for 14 consecutive classes.

School: Each week in the school, a different corporal or spiritual work of mercy could be emphasized.

⁴ Misericordiae Vultus, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy

⁵ Preaching the Mystery of Faith, The Sunday Homily, USCCB. “Certainly, doctrine is not meant to be propounded in a homily in the way that it might unfold in a theology classroom or a lecture for an academic audience or even a catechism lesson. The homily is integral to the liturgical act of the Eucharist, and the language and spirit of the homily should fit that context. Yet catechesis in its broadest sense involves the effective communication of the full scope of the Church’s teaching and formation, from initiation into the Sacrament of Baptism through the moral requirements of a faithful Christian life.”

Youth Ministry: Youth nights could focus on the works of mercy.

Mission or Talks: A parish could consider having a mission speaker on these aspects of the year of Grace. Or perhaps the pastor, priest, deacon, or lay theologian could have a series of talks on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Perhaps the Spiritual works of Mercy could be preached upon during advent and the corporal works of mercy could be taught during the season of Lent.

Bulletin: Another traditional means through which these could be taught is through the bulletin. perhaps an insert that thoroughly talks about each of the works of mercy. This insert could be done over a course of a month. This could coincide with the preaching on the works of mercy. Or perhaps in the bulletin, a corner could be utilized that takes a spiritual or corporal work of mercy each week. The Bulletin certainly could supplement other fonts of teaching.

III. OTHER MEANS OF CATECHESIS

Social Media: The parish could utilize a variety of the forms of New Media to reinforce the more traditional fonts of communication. Facebook, twitter, instagram, pinterest, video blogs and flock note all could contain information on the corporal works of mercy. Moreover email correspondence could have a brief salutation that contains information about the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Small Group Reflections: In many parishes there are a variety of small group ministries. These ministries may look slightly different in every parish but essentially they have the same effect. Groups of parishioners get together routinely for a common purpose to help each other grow in their discipleship in Jesus Christ and to serve the Church in some way. These small group ministries are perfect places where small group reflections can be made for the year of mercy. These reflections could take a spiritual and corporal work of mercy each week, analyze discuss, and look at a way to implement it. Discussion questions could follow.

A Home Kit for the Works of Mercy: Parents are the first teachers of the faith. Therefore, parishes could place in the hands of the parents a means to teach about the faith. A home kit for teaching about the works of mercy could be established. Following the Montessori approach, this home kit could have items that represent each of the works of mercy. Families could slowly work through these items each week at dinner time to talk and discuss the significance of each work of mercy.

IV. MORE THAN JUST KNOWING: LIVING OUT THE CATECHESIS

The very nature of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy is meant to be lived out in the Christian Life. They are moral by nature and therefore require a human moral response. To learn about them and to not enact them would be like to know about Jesus Christ but not to allow His saving Grace to love one. Therefore each of the works of mercy when described should have a practical means through which they can be lived out.

V. PRACTICAL MEANS TO LIVE OUT THE WORKS OF MERCY

As a person: During one of the seasons of the Church, each week a person could engage in a spiritual or corporal work of mercy. This work of mercy could be studied. Their could be an examen of conscience based on this work of mercy and the person could try to implement the work within their families first and then with others.

As a family: A family could set aside some time to discuss these works of mercy. According to the age of the family members, a family plan could be enacted which would allow the living out of these works of mercy. Perhaps a work of mercy is lived out each month in a special way based on how the family decides.

As a parish: Different groups in the parish could study the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. They could then choose 3 or 4 which they will highlight throughout the year.

VI. UNITY IN PROCLAMATION:

To help most people to remember concepts, educators state the importance of repeating and revisiting the concept. For this reason, it would be wise for a parish to decide to engage in the Jubilee Year of Mercy and the catechesis of the works of mercy through a holistic approach. Planning the homilies with bulletin inserts, social media, talks, and practical take home experiences would provide the repetitive experience that will allow the parishioners to really understand the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. This requires strategic planning in this comprehensive approach.

VII. TIED TO THE SPIRITUAL

The works of mercy are only valid if enacted through the prism of faith. The other person must be seen with the eyes of faith and be known as the face of Jesus. Pope Francis wrote this prayer to illustrate the spiritual tie to the works of mercy.

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.
Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty
to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.
We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy,
you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.
Excerpted from Pope Francis' Prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy