

Jubilee of Mercy – Corporal Works of Mercy

The “corporal” works of mercy – “charitable actions by which we help our neighbors in their bodily needs” (U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults) – are derived from Christ’s teaching about the final judgment in Matthew 25, in which he says that the charitable actions done for the least of his brothers were done for him, and that, conversely, the failure to act charitably toward others was a failure to act charitably toward him.

Six corporal works of mercy are directly from the Gospel – feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the imprisoned. A 7th – bury the dead – is traditionally added. Another – give alms to the poor – is more recent, listed as an 8th work in the USCCA and as the 7th on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) website, omitting “clothe the naked” to retain the traditional number of 7 works. Donating to a charity that serves the poor may accomplish several works of mercy, depending on the specific activities of the organization.

The USCCB website offers these suggestions for living out the works of mercy:

Feed the hungry – When so much food goes to waste, consider how good stewardship practices of your own food can benefit others who do not have those same resources. If you find that you throw out excess food, cut back on grocery purchases and donate the savings to charity. Donate staple goods or money to a food pantry.

Give drink to the thirsty – Many lack the basic necessity of clean water. Support the efforts of those working towards greater accessibility of this essential resource. Fund a charity (e.g., Catholic Relief Services) that builds wells to provide fresh water.

Shelter the homeless – Reach out to the homeless, affirming their worth and helping them seek a resolution to the challenges they face. Volunteer at a homeless shelter. Welcome refugees from war-torn or impoverished places.

Visit the sick – The sick are often forgotten or avoided. In spite of their illness, these individuals still have much to offer to those who take the time to visit and comfort them. Give blood. Volunteer at a nursing home. Visit an elderly neighbor. Help a caregiver.

Visit prisoners – People in prison are still people, made in God’s image and likeness. No matter what they have done, they deserve the opportunity to hear the Word of God and find the truth of Christ’s message. Get involved in a local prison ministry.

Bury the dead – Funerals give us the opportunity to grieve and to support others during difficult times. Through our prayers and actions, we show our respect for life and comfort those who mourn. Participate in wakes and funerals in your community.

Give alms to the poor – Donate to organizations that provide support and services for those in need. Find organizations that put needy people first, rather than profit. In addition to giving money, look for opportunities to volunteer your time and talents.

“Come, you who are blessed ... Inherit the kingdom prepared for you.” (Mt 25:34)