

Works of Mercy

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?" Then he will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me." And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

~ Matthew 25:34-46

IN THESE WORDS, Jesus makes it clear to us that we are called to serve others. This call to service is not optional but an outpouring of our faith in and love for Christ. Scripture says, "faith apart from works is dead" (Jas 2:26) and so, like those in the story, we too will



Stained glass of Christ being taken down from the Cross, Cathedral of Chartres, France, dating from the 15th century

be judged on the basis of the mercy and love we showed to others.

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preferential love for the poor. The goods and wealth we possess are

This reality is not meant to scare us but is meant to underline the importance of our actions. This story awakens in us the responsibility we have toward others.

Christ freely took upon himself our human weakness and identified himself with the poor. The Church, following the example of Christ, also has a

not really ours; we are only stewards over these things which ultimately come from God’s abundance and goodness. His goods are not spread out evenly and so we are given the responsibility to work toward a more just distribution of wealth. Justice demands that some of our energy, time, and wealth be spent toward this aim: “[I]f any one has the world’s

goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 Jn 3:17). Jesus says, “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise” (Lk 3:11).

“Poverty” means more than physical poverty; it includes spiritual needs. We show mercy toward others when we provide for their needs at either of these two levels. The **corporal works of mercy** meet physical needs and include giving alms to the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, and burying the dead. The **spiritual works of mercy** meet spiritual needs by teaching, advising in love, admonishing the sinner, consoling those who mourn, comforting the afflicted, forgiving wrongdoing, and bearing wrongs patiently.

Pagans who observed the early Church would remark, “See how they love one another.” The witness of love in action is the essence of the works of mercy and is a powerful message of the Gospel to the unbeliever. Whether physical or spiritual, we should all be working to meet the needs of others and make faith come alive with good works.

“Stretch forth your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. Give graciously to all the living, and withhold not kindness from the dead. Do not fail those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Do not shrink from visiting a sick man, because for such deeds you will be loved” (Sir 7:32-35).

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