



Meeting #6: The Spiritual Works of Mercy

Preparatory Reading and Reflection [Attachment A, p. 2]

The attached readings (or other readings preferred by the local group) can be distributed prior to the meeting so that all can read and reflect beforehand. Or some portion of them may be read out loud at the meeting. Or one member of the group may summarize the readings.

Spiritual Works of Mercy & Scriptural References

Excerpts from:

Misericordiae Vultus (the Papal bull that proclaimed the Year of Mercy)

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§ 127-8

Pope Francis, General Audience, February 12, 2014

Readings from Dorothy Day, Gordon Cosby

Opening Prayer: Prayer to Perform the Works of Mercy [Attachment B, p. 6]

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12-17 - Attachment C, p. 7]

Discussion questions:

1. The Jesuit theologian James F. Keenan has defined mercy as “the willingness to enter into the chaos of another.” How willing am I to enter into the chaos of a family member, neighbor, or even stranger?
2. How does membership in the Order give me opportunities to perform the spiritual works of mercy? Is doing them with the Order different from doing them on my own?
3. How will I act differently as a result of this group reflection? (This may be discussed, or it may be a question for each to consider in a few minutes of silence.)

Meditative Poem to Conclude the Year of Mercy [Attachment D, p. 8]

Closing Prayer: Prayer of the Order [Attachment E, p. 9]

Attachment A

Spiritual Works of Mercy and Readings – Meeting 6

The Spiritual Works of Mercy:

- To instruct the ignorant;
- To counsel the doubtful;
- To admonish sinners;
- To bear wrongs patiently;
- To forgive offences willingly;
- To comfort the afflicted;
- To pray for the living and the dead.

Some Sources in Scripture

Matthew 25:31-46

Matthew 5

Isaiah 58:6-7

Hebrews 13:3

1 John 3:17

2 Timothy 4:3

Tobit 4:5-11

Matthew 6:2-4

Luke 3:11, 11:41

James 2:15-16

Excerpt from *Misericordiae Vultus*

15. And let us not forget the *spiritual works of mercy*: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead. We cannot escape the Lord's words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged.... We will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these "little ones," Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled... to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us. Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: "as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love."

Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. In this preaching, which is always respectful and gentle, a first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Only afterwards is it possible to bring up God's word, perhaps by reading a Bible verse or relating a story, but always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship. This message has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn.... At times the message can be presented directly, at times by way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way which the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation. If it seems prudent and if the circumstances are right, this fraternal and missionary encounter could end with a brief prayer related to the concerns which the person may have expressed. In this way they will have an experience of being listened to and understood; they will know that their particular situation has been placed before God, and that God's word really speaks to their lives. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§ 127-8)

Now we, when participating in Holy Mass, we find ourselves with all sorts of men and women: young people, the elderly, children; poor and well-off; locals and strangers alike; people with their families and people who are alone.... But the Eucharist which I celebrate, does it lead me to truly feel they are all like brothers and sisters? Does it increase my capacity to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and cry with those who are crying? Does it urge me to go out to the poor, the sick, the marginalized? Does it help me to recognize in theirs the face of Jesus? We all go to Mass because we love Jesus and we want to share, through the Eucharist, in his passion and his resurrection. But do we love, as Jesus wishes, those brothers and sisters who are the most needy? For example, in Rome these days we have seen much social discomfort either due to the rain, which has caused so much damage to entire districts, or because of the lack of work, a consequence of the global economic crisis. I wonder, and each one of us should wonder: I who go to Mass, how do I live this? Do I try to help, to approach and pray for those in difficulty? Or am I a little indifferent? (Pope Francis' General Audience, February 12, 2014)

Everything a baptized person does every day should be directly or indirectly related to the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy....

We do what we can, and the whole field of all the Works of Mercy is open to us. There is a saying, "Do what you are doing." ...It is a penance to work, to give oneself to others, to endure the pinpricks of community living. One would certainly say on many occasions: Give me a good, thorough, frank, outgoing war, rather than the sneak attacks, stabs in the back, sparring, detracting, defaming, hand-to-hand jockeying for position that go on in offices and "good works" of all kinds, another and miserably petty kind of war. Saint Paul said that he "died daily." This too is penance, to be taken cheerfully, joyfully... So let us rejoice in our own petty sufferings and thank God we have a little penance to offer, in this holy season. (Dorothy Day, *Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day*)

[Prayer for the Living and the Dead]

In our times of prayer we will learn how to be pastors.... Our meeting with the person we have prayed for cannot be other than different.... Sometimes the change comes first in me. The veil from my own eyes is lifted. I see that in me which blocks a relationship. I am more able to allow a conversation to reach profounder levels than the usual pleasant exchanges, or I learn to share with another the fruit of a meditation, or to make a telephone call that says I am concerned. We must move toward that day when we do not have people within our group who struggle week after week with the same problem and we are unaware of it because we are not the kind of people to whom others tell their problems. Somehow we must be able to make it known that another's burden matters to us... We support and nurture one another by our very attentiveness. (Rev. Gordon Cosby, quoted in Elizabeth O'Connor, *Call to Commitment*, p. 131)

A new and recommended book of reflections on each work of mercy , which includes reflections from the Pope and our Conventual Chaplain Donald Cardinal Wuerl, is *Beautiful Mercy* (Dynamic Catholic Institute, 2015), available from Amazon.

Attachment B

Opening Prayer – Meeting 6

O God, it is easy to love the whole world, but hard to love the person one works next to;

O God, it is easy to campaign for world peace, but hard to contribute to the peace within my own home;

O God, it is easy to be fascinated with some new truth, and miss you in the thing I have known so long;

O God, it is easy to share my home and possessions with people I like. Teach me how to be generous toward others.

Enable me today to say something or do something that will make a difference to the discouraged, to the inexperienced, to the despairing.

Let no selfish concern with my own affairs shut me off from any today. For your love's sake.
Amen

---Rita Snowden

Attachment C

Scripture Reading: Meeting 6

Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NRSV)

Attachment D

Meditative Poem to Conclude the Year of Mercy

THE MERCY OF GOD

I am copying down in a book from my heart's archives
the day that I ceased to fear God with a shadowy fear.

Would you name it the day that I measured my column of virtue
and sighted through windows of merit a crown that was near?

Ah, no, it was rather the day I began to see truly
that I came forth from nothing and ever toward nothingness tend,
that the works of my hands are a foolishness wrought in the presence
of the worthiest king in a kingdom that shall never end.

I rose up from the acres of self that I tended with passion
and defended with flurries of pride;
I walked out of myself and went into the woods of God's mercy,
and here I abide.

There is greenness and calmness and coolness, a soft leafy covering
from the judgment of sun overhead,
and the hush of His peace, and the moss of His mercy to tread.

I have naught but my will seeking God; even love burning in me
is a fragment of infinite loving and never my own.

And I fear God no more; I go forward to wander forever
in a wilderness made of His infinite mercy alone.

(Jessica Powers, Sister Miriam of the Holy Spirit, O.C.D [1949])

Attachment E

Closing Prayer: Meeting 6

The Prayer of the Order

Lord Jesus, Thou hast seen fit to enlist me for Thy service in the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. I humbly entreat Thee, through the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin of Philermos, of Saint John the Baptist, of Blessed Fra' Gerard, and of all the Saints, to keep me faithful to the traditions of our Order.

Be it mine to practice and defend the Catholic, the Apostolic, the Roman Faith against the enemies of religion. Be it mine to practice charity towards my neighbors, especially the poor and the sick.

Give me the strength I need to carry out this my resolve, forgetful of myself, learning ever from Thy Holy Gospel a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion, striving ever to promote God's glory, the world's peace, and all that may benefit the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.

Amen.