

Nurturing Faith at Home ***Involving Your Children in Corporal Acts of Mercy – Part 1***

The Catholic Church identifies seven *corporal* acts or works of mercy. For ancient Hebrews, the word 'mercy' was associated with *compassion*, the virtue of recognizing someone in need and then helping them. To have mercy also means to give *forgiveness*. God's people – the Israelites – would sometimes not listen to God and would get into trouble. God always forgave them and showed them mercy. In return, His people were to show mercy to others. Jesus shows us what mercy is, by His own example. In the bible there are many stories about Jesus forgiving sinners, healing the sick, and chasing demons away, so that the people could live a happier life.

The Good Samaritan

Jesus also tells the parable of the *Good Samaritan*, in which he teaches us what it means to show mercy and compassion. Briefly, the parable is as follows: A man is robbed on a road and left for dead. Two people, a Levite and a priest walk by, ignoring the man. A third man – a Samaritan and, therefore, an adversary – then stops to help the man and arrange for the man's complete care, all at the Good Samaritan's expense. This is compassion and mercy in action. And Jesus instructs us that the reward is great for those who show mercy; in the Beatitudes, he teaches, *Blessed are the merciful; they shall have mercy shown them.* (Matt. 5: 7)

The word *corporal* means 'body'. Therefore, corporal works of mercy are those that meet the physical or bodily needs of the person.

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Scripture-Based

It is Jesus himself who teaches us the corporal acts of mercy, in his parable of the Last Judgment. The parable describes the king separating the sheep from the goats. The discussion between the king and those on his right side goes like this: *"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."* (Matthew 25: 34 – 40)

The Corporal Acts of Mercy

Six of the seven corporal acts of mercy are derived from the above scripture passage:

- Feed the hungry.
- Give drink to the thirsty.
- Clothe the naked.
- Shelter the homeless; welcome the stranger.
- Visit the sick.
- Visit the imprisoned.

The seventh is:

- Bury the dead.

Let's look at each of them individually and some ways you might consider in helping your children to be 'Good Samaritans'.

Feeding the Hungry

Although God made a world that can feed all of its people, many suffer from hunger and malnutrition, due to lack of money or due to poor growing conditions such as drought

or flood. God asks us to share this gift of food. Activities to consider:

- Collect food for the local food bank. Volunteer to help.
- Bake cookies for the disabled, sick, homebound, and elderly.
- Help organizations such as Heifer International (www.heimer.org). This organization provides livestock (e.g. goats) for poor families in other countries.
- Sponsor an overseas foster child through programs such as Chalice at <http://www.chalice.ca/>

Giving Drink to the Thirsty

Many people do not have enough water to drink, either due to drought or because the water they have is polluted and unsafe to drink. In many parts of the world, women and children spend great amounts of time and energy carrying water for their families from distant wells.

- Raise money to support the building of water wells in drought-ridden countries. Support Ryan Hreljac, a young Canadian, who has made clean water his life's mission. See www.ryanswell.org.
- Children can set up a lemonade stand or, in the winter, a hot chocolate stand and raise money.
- Teach your children to conserve the water we have. Seek ways of using it more wisely; e.g. using the dishwasher only when it is full, turning off the tap while brushing teeth, shorter showers.
- Involve your children in cleaning up the environment and in keeping lakes and rivers in your community clean. With care, collect trash that you find along the banks.

NOTE: We shall look more closely at the remaining corporal acts of mercy next month.