SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

What you can do    |    by Bill Scholl

The corporal works of mercy are ably done by most Christians. The spiritual works of mercy, however, require more discernment and humility.

There’s a saying that goes, “In the spiritual life, you can’t give what you don’t have.”

In order to do four of the spiritual works, in other words — to admonish, instruct, counsel and comfort — it is important to ensure you are equipped. That’s why, as Catholics, we are lifelong learners of the faith — so we are able to be agents of God’s spiritual mercy.

But in some instances you may not be the agent to admonish or instruct. This task may fall to another.

However, the three remaining works — pray, forgive and bear wrongs — belong in the daily life of all the baptized.

Learn the spiritual works of mercy

The archbishop is encouraging all Catholics to memorize the spiritual works of mercy. The mnemonic device “B PACIFIC” (like the ocean) can help. Both the “e” in be and the second “i” in pacific are silent.

B ear wrongs patiently
P ray for the living and the dead
A dmonish sinners
C ounsel the doubtful
I nstruct the ignorant
F orgive offenses
C omfort the afflicted
Counsel the Doubtful

Helping others with the negative thoughts that hinder Christ’s peace is the goal of this work. As St. Elizabeth Ann Seton asks, “Who can hold back the soul that God sets free?”

The emotional demons of discouragement, self-pity, apathy, fear and despair can hold one back from the serenity and spiritual growth Christ wants for us. So, make yourself available to listen and affirm people in ways that help them to see that they are a good gift. Members of the body of Christ need to encourage one another.

Ideas: Make time to spend with friends and be present. Consider getting training to be a spiritual mentor.

Instruct the Ignorant

Ignorance is simply the absence of knowledge. However, as with any profession, there are basic things to know. As we profess our faith at Mass, we need to understand fully what we believe. Just as the plumber who doesn’t know how to sweat pipe needs more training, so does the Catholic who doesn’t understand the creed. It is important to engage our friends in religious dialogue.

Ideas: Study apologetics. Keep copies of the Catechism of the Catholic Church to give away. Listen to Catholic Radio.

Forgive Offenses

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In teaching us how to pray, Our Lord teaches us how to live. We get mercy to the measure we are willing to give mercy.

Forgiveness is hard when others don’t apologize. Yet, forgiveness frees us, for often we suffer from over-sensitivity, pride and an ego that seeks vengeance. You can’t be happy and wrathful at the same time. Take St. Paul’s advice: “Repay no one evil for evil... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom 12:17a; 21).

Remember that the best way to destroy your enemy is to make him your friend, for that is what Christ is trying to do with you.

Ideas: Pray for the ones who hurt you. Let go of grudges. Seek forgiveness from others.

Comfort the Afflicted

For the Christian, this world is a place of transition. While we are made to seek happiness, we know the world can never satisfy and that life will have sadness and setbacks. As St. Augustine says, “Our hearts are restless till they rest in God.”

Illness, death and loss all cause profound grief. Yet, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he saves those whose spirit is crushed” (Ps 34:19). God wants to give consolation, and he calls upon us to help. Just listening and expressing empathy can be an avenue of grace.

In grief, people go one of two ways: closer to God or further away. As a Christian, you can be the midwife that helps the griever birth a deeper relationship with Christ.

Ideas: Volunteer with Catholic Community Hospice, help with a grief ministry.

For more ideas, visit the website at: www.archkck.org/mercy.