

Living the Spirit Mercy Part 4

There are many aspects of this Year of Mercy that need our attention. Pope Francis in his establishment of this Holy Year has given a wide interpretation to the activities that will be necessary in order to gain the Holy Year Indulgence. It is very clear that he sets the conditions of entering the Holy Door. To this action one must add prayers for him and his intentions “for the good of the Church and of the entire world.” One must also accompany this action with recitation of the Creed. As usual with indulgences, one must also go to confession and receive the Eucharist.

The Holy Father was concerned for those who are unable for various reasons to enter the Holy Door. These include the sick, elderly and alone, often confined to the home. He adds his concern for the incarcerated. Here I cannot but add that many of those in our nursing homes fit this category to both gain the indulgence and also provide for others the way they may gain it. They would do so by visiting the sick, the lonely and those who in a different way can be seen as imprisoned by their disabilities.

Finally the Holy Father added his desire for us to “discover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence.”

The spiritual works of mercy are: to counsel the doubtful, to instruct the ignorant, to admonish the sinner, to comfort the sorrowful, to forgive injuries, to bear wrongs patiently and to pray for the living and the dead. The corporal works of mercy are: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to visit the sick, to visit the imprisoned and to bury the dead. The details of how these acts are to be performed are left to the normal creativity of the one desiring to perform these good works of mercy.

As Lent is about to come upon us so quickly, we must decide just what we will do in this holy season to make it truly a part of this Year of Mercy. During Lent we usually try to be much more prayerful than we usually are. Why not make the effort to attend Mass more often and: “pray for the living and the dead?” Why not make your confession a bit more carefully and be open to the graces of the Holy Spirit. After all, He has given you many gifts of wisdom, knowledge, courage and understanding. Try to make sure you ask God to activate these gifts and make you truly a person who receives and gives mercy.

Many of the activities found in our parishes are ways to fulfill the condition of performing these works of mercy. One should be alert to recognize these activities as ways to help us live the Christian life more fully and selflessly.

Not long ago I was attracted by a listing in a catalog to several books. I thought to myself that I really needed to give in and purchase them. [Books are my weakness.] Among them were two books which sum up the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments.* The books were written for young persons, and without a great deal of scholarly additions. I found them quite inspiring. The author was a noted French author of Catholic books on many subjects. His style is a bit from the past, but I found it refreshing, since too many books today are damaged by the use of so-called politically correct language.

In the first book I read of the great mercies that God has for His people. I reflected on the work of Israel in preparing the world for the coming of the Messiah. I read with delight “the splendors or the examples of heroic loyalty” of the people dedicated to the one true God. The author closes his work on the Old Testament by writing: “There is a sequel to this story, an even more splendid one. It is the story of the real Messiah, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught truth and love to the world.” This reminded me that in the end one learns from the Bible that in various ways, it is all about this One Messiah. And in knowing Him we, like the people of Old and New Testament times, can find the love that is eternal. It is merciful love of God for us, and calls us to return love for love.

In his second book, the author, Henri Daniel-Rops, recounts the life of Christ with many passages that reveal the great mercy of Jesus for all of us. Certainly his sacrifice on the Cross was the greatest work of mercy, making forgiveness of humanity’s sin able to be forgiven. We find in the parables the teachings of mercy that are so simply expressed as Jesus told them. We find in His actions the great miracles which grew out of the merciful heart of the Savior.

Going beyond the theme of mercy, the author ends his writing by reminding us that we have a mission to evangelize the world in which we live. We know that many in our world do not know Christ. Many, too, are ignorant and hostile to His message of love. He ends:

“There is not one among us who has not known the tenderness ... by which Jesus and the Church have for all these centuries welcomed sinners back into the fold. You already know from your own experience, and you will continue to learn as grow older, that there are moments in life when we are overcome by grief and sadness and feel that there is no courage or strength left in us. We are crushed under the weight of our sins and ask ourselves how we can regain our happiness. It is in moments such as this, when we kneel and pray in the shadowy interior of some church, that we feel an invisible but infinitely consoling Presence. In the silence there is a Voice which answers our questions, and a gentle hand seems to be laid on our forehead.

We know whose presence this is: it is Jesus who is always there, always ready to forgive the sins of men. Just as in the days when He cured the blind and the crippled, He asks only one thing of us in order to give us peace again. It is the cry to which He never turns a deaf ear; Lord, I believe! Have pity on me!”

In this Year of Mercy, let us pray: ***Lord, I believe; Lord, have mercy on me!***

God love you always!

Monsignor David Morrison