

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

Prayer is our next **Work of Mercy** – **praying for the living and the dead**. Many times, we can think that when we pray, we're not really doing anything, but that's probably because we have a faulty understanding of prayer. Prayer is not about us coming to grips with our inner life, or a connection with an impersonal force greater than ourselves (this isn't *Star Wars*, after all). Prayer is *relationship* with God Almighty; communication, communion with the God of the universe. As we come to greater understanding of who He is (our loving and tender Father) and who we are (His beloved and precious sons and daughters), we come to a better understanding of how He relates with us (He *delights* in us – in you and me!). As we come to understand this, our confidence in His love grows . . . and the saints show us that confidence in God's merciful and tender love is the key to His Heart; it is irresistible to Him; He cannot refuse such tender confidence. When we pray *expecting* Him to act – not because we've "said the right words," or found that "irresistible novena," but because we know He can't resist our love – He *does* act.

This means that when we offer up prayers to God, in this loving confidence, when we trust Him and His love for us (and all of the people He has made), when we ask for Him to act . . . He does! Now, a quick qualification: this doesn't mean He always works in the exact way we ask, or on our time schedule. That being said, He ALWAYS acts for our greatest good, and ALWAYS responds to our loving pleas.

The merciful work of praying for the living and the dead, therefore, is a *vital* work for the world. When people come to us with their problems and struggles, it is so easy for us to respond, "I'll pray for you." It is much harder to bring them and their struggles regularly before the throne of God. Truly we have taken on a great responsibility when we promise to pray for someone. There is an expectation, first, that we will actually pray, and second, that something will happen because of our prayers. This is why praying is a **Work of Mercy**: it takes *work* on our part, and it brings the merciful love of God into people's lives (it is effective).

But what about praying for the dead? There it is at the top of the page, praying for the living *and the dead*. This gets into the doctrine of Purgatory (which is for another bulletin article!). This merciful gift from God allows us – who end our lives as friends of God, but who have not truly been purified of all of our selfishness and attachment to sin – to be purified after our deaths, and so have hope of the eternal embrace of God (a.k.a. Heaven). Those in Purgatory cannot pray for themselves in their purification (but they can pray for us, so don't forget to ask for their prayers), but we can pray for them. Our prayers and sacrifices speed them through the purification process and into God's loving embrace. This is one reason we have Funeral Masses for the deceased – we join in on this *most powerful prayer* of the Mass for our recently departed, and it helps them into Heaven. (For more on Purgatory, check out the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1030-1032.)

All of this being said, when we look at the mess the world is in right now, I don't think it takes a genius to realize we need prayer – and A LOT of it! With all of the shootings of late, the wars, hatred and violence that surround us – how providential it is that Pope Francis called for a Year of Mercy. In this world which has rejected the sacred dignity of human life – treating it like something that can be destroyed or used at our whim – we need to pray (again, with GREAT CONFIDENCE that God *will* act) for a greater respect for human life in our world. **I invite you to be a part of the solution. I invite you to join me in prayer to invoke God's mercy upon the world.** Every week, before the weekend Masses, we have been praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet, starting about 12 minutes before Mass. **I invite you in a special way to join me next weekend (January 23-24) to pray the chaplet with me before each of the Masses. I invite you to join me reaching up, with great trust, to the God of Heaven that He may bring to our world a renewed sense of our sacred personhood.** Do not be afraid that you don't know the Divine Mercy Chaplet (it's pretty simple, actually, and I bet you'll get the hang of it quickly; check it out at: [thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/chaplet.php](http://thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/chaplet.php)). Join me, especially next weekend, in this **Work of Mercy** of praying for the world!