

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This week, we will look at the **Spiritual Work of Mercy** known as **Counselling the Doubtful**. This is different from “giving advice”. “Advice is cheap” and comes from opinion; it is when I give you *my* point of view of how to act in a situation. **Counsel** is different. Counsel is a Gift of the Holy Spirit, and you remember that we receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation – wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, courage/fortitude, piety, and wonder and awe (see Isaiah 11). The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit given in Confirmation are given to us to help us grow in holiness, to grow closer to God, to prepare ourselves for Heaven. This means that **counsel**, as a work of mercy, is about assisting others as they follow Jesus Christ, the way and the truth and the life (see John 14:6).

Counsel is given not at the whim of the giver (“I think you need to hear my wonderful advice on how to live your life”), but when someone is truly doubtful about the path they need to take to follow God. When someone is at this crossroads – whether it be a doubt about one’s faith, about marriage, about abortion, or issues arising around death or divorce, or any other of so many issues – it is a great mercy to help someone see God’s loving Hand in all of it, helping them find the true path to joy.

Several years ago, a young woman came to me in desperation. She was pregnant, and wanted to speak to me about having an abortion. As we talked, I realized she wanted me to say that it was *okay* for her to have an abortion. When I realized this, I gently told her that I could not say that. She immediately started crying and saying, “Then God is going to hate me!” As we spoke (and I prayed), I tried to reassure her that God did not hate her, and, in fact, that He never would hate her, but that He *loved* her too much to want her to have this abortion. God saw the *hurt she* would have to endure at this death of her baby. I don’t know what she eventually did, but I pray that she was open to God’s will.

When someone is in doubt about how to follow God, it is truly a work of mercy to help shed light on the moment. Some people think we shouldn’t “impose our morality” – and I agree that we shouldn’t. But if we truly believe that God is a loving God, and that everything He wills for us is GOOD, LOVING, and brings JOY and FRUIT, then we don’t *impose* the counsel on someone, we *propose* to them the truth of God’s love. Counsel means bringing the truth which sets us free to the doubtful. We want the other person to see that God has a way through the problem, and His way will truly bring them joy!

In this Year of Mercy, let us ask God to stir up in us the gift of counsel, and ask that He give us the wisdom, prudence and courage to use it to draw others out of the confusion and darkness of doubt into the light of God’s love.