

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

In this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, we hear our Holy Father – Pope Francis – calling us to be merciful as the Father is merciful. Over the last several weeks, we have looked at the **Spiritual Works of Mercy**. This week we begin looking at the **Corporal Works of Mercy**. The word “Corporal” has to do with the body. While the Spiritual Works of Mercy are focused on being helping people to grow spiritually, the Corporal Works of Mercy are about helping people bodily. These seven works are: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the imprisoned, visit the sick, and bury the dead. Most of these come from Matthew 25:31-46: the judgment of the nations. This is the Scripture passage, where Jesus tells about the end of time and that when we do these acts of mercy, we do them to Him (or if we fail to do them, we fail to help Him). The final work is taken from the Old Testament book of Tobit, where Tobit is commended by the Archangel Raphael for burying the dead, even at the risk of imprisonment and exile.

An important point about the Works of Mercy is that God is not indifferent to our love (or lack of love). In fact, the love and mercy we show to those in need we actually show to Jesus Christ. It sounds like a nice platitude, but there is a deep reality here: God identifies Himself, not just with those who are suffering, but *as* those who are suffering. Jesus is *so present* in our misery, that when we help the poor or downtrodden, we are really helping Jesus! Never can we say that God doesn't know our suffering or that He is far away! Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta says this: **“We should not serve the poor like they were Jesus. We should serve the poor because they are Jesus.”** [emphasis added]

This week we are going to look at the first two Corporal Works of Mercy: feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty. Jesus felt hunger and thirst deeply in His humanity. This weekend's Gospel speaks of the temptations of Jesus. Saint Luke is careful to note that Jesus, after fasting for forty days, “was hungry” (Luke 4:2). (As an aside, I would guess that saying Jesus “was hungry” is a HUGE understatement.) In the story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well (John 4:4-42), we hear how Jesus experienced great thirst. When the woman shows up at the well, the first thing He says to her is a request for water: “Give me a drink” (John 4:7). The Gospels, while recognizing the full divinity (“God-ness”) of Jesus, do not avoid His humanity – no, they show Him hungry and thirsty and tired and in need. Jesus became human so that He could unite Himself to us, take on our suffering, and show the depths of His love for us. Had He taken away our sin from the outside, we might have wondered whether He really knew what we have to go through. No, He experienced it Himself (and still experiences it *in* us) so that we cannot say, “God doesn't know what it means to suffer.” We are called by Christ to care for those in need. We do so not to make *us* feel good, or for some vague humanitarian reason; no, we do so because when we feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, we do this for Christ. And there are plenty who are hungry in this world today.

Fr. Brian Kennedy, C.S.s.R., is the pastor at St. Matthew Parish in Windham. For many years, as a Redemptorist (hence the initials after his name), he spent his priesthood ministering to the people of the Dominican Republic. Since his return to New Hampshire, he has led several mission trips back to Dominican. In many places of the Dominican, the people have to walk for miles to come to a stream with drinkable water. Fr. Brian's groups have been able to create a pipe system to provide ready water supplies in each village. In a powerful way, these missionaries are giving drink to the thirsty!

When we stand before God, we will see clearly every person who we met, every interaction we had. Some interactions we may rejoice at, for the selfless love that we show; others, we may have to hang our heads in shame at how we ignored the sacred humanity and need of the person in front of us. The world is big and we can't stop all hunger and thirst on our own, but we can do something. There are people we meet who are in need. We have the local food pantries that service Pelham, the Food Bank in Manchester which services the whole state, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services (the money from the Rice Bowls goes to them) which work nationally and internationally – not to mention the multitudes of other organizations that work to bring food and drink to those in need. There are so many ways that we can help, even a little. What we can't do is *nothing*! We will stand before Jesus one day and we will see how we helped – or neglected – Him in each person that we met.