

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This week, we will be looking at the **Corporal Work of Mercy: to Clothe the Naked**. If clothing the naked is a work of mercy, it might do us well to ponder the use of clothing. In my brief reflection on this, I see that clothing in our society has two main purposes. The first purpose of clothing is to shield us against the elements. In the extreme cold we have experienced this week, we can easily see the need for clothing... and lots of it!

The other obvious use of clothing is to shield our dignity from the gaze of others. Remember that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were naked without shame – a reminder to us that God created our bodies truly to be good. Before the *Fall* – before the Original Sin – Adam and Eve did not look on each other as objects to be used for their own selfish pleasure – rather, they gave themselves to each other without selfishness; they held nothing back from the other, for there was no fear of being ridiculed or used. (We can see a bit of this still in the innocence of young children, who like to run around the house naked!) After the Fall, we see that Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves (and later animal skins) to protect themselves from being used and abused by the other. This is why if a stranger were to walk in on us as we are getting out of the shower, our instinct would be to cover ourselves – we need to protect our dignity from the ogling stares of others.

In this sense, clothing is used for more than protection from the cold or rain or heat of the sun, but helps to defend our dignity as a person. In many cases, we also see that the choice of clothing also helps to define the person. If we were to walk into a Mercedes dealership with the intention of buying a top of the line car, we will probably get better service if we go “dressed for success” than if we go dress in ripped sweatpants and a dirty t-shirt. Sadly, we judge others by clothing.

Jesus entered into the brokenness of the world and He took on the shame of nakedness. Before He was crucified, He was stripped naked (the loin cloth we see on most Crucifixes is for our sake, not because it is historically accurate). The Romans stripped Him in an attempt to rob Him of His identity (He who is the “Great I AM”) and His dignity (the Jewish people of the first century were very modest, and had violently rebelled – literally warring – against the Greeks who had tried to introduce public nudity in their culture). Jesus knows the indignity of being naked before the eyes of a crowd, of being ignored, rejected, and having His dignity robbed by the culture. When Jesus in Matthew 25:35 says, “I was naked and you clothed me,” He is not speaking in pious platitudes, but speaking the truth of how He was stripped naked – and is present in this way in all who have been dehumanized by the culture of use and abuse; present in all who do not have all they need to survive and are marginalized by society.

So what is our action? How do we clothe Jesus? In our own parish, every fall, the Men’s Club makes blankets out of excess fleece donated by Polartec, and then delivers them to homeless shelters in the area. One possible Lenten practice is to go through our closets and thin them out. While our Food Pantry does NOT accept clothing donations, there are many places that do, including Lazarus House in Lawrence ([lazarushouse.org/clothing](http://lazarushouse.org/clothing)). If we are honest with ourselves, we can see that we probably have a lot of *good* clothes that we don’t *really* need. Jesus says, “**Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none**” (Luke 3:11). This is a hard pill to swallow, but will help us realize that we have too much while others go without.

Jason Evert, a national chastity speaker, tells about how he goes to bookstores at airports when he is travelling and places gardening magazines over the “less than modest” magazine covers – he considers this as clothing the naked! While this may be a humorous way of looking at it, the truth is he recognizes the sacred dignity of the persons who have become objects for the ogling pleasure of others, and he desires for them to be protected from that gaze and recover their dignity as a person.

Another way that we can clothe the naked is to recognize the dignity of each person we encounter. Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “If my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self.” Clothing someone in dignity means I give them myself, in some way, which could mean my precious time.

What creative ways can you think of to clothe the naked?