

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This week we will look at the **Corporal Work of Mercy: Sheltering the Homeless**. Again, we see that homelessness is not something Jesus simply speaks about, but experienced. In Luke 9:57-58, someone comes to Jesus saying, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus warns this would-be-follower that "**Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.**" We don't know what happened to the person who was so excited to follow Jesus, but we know that Jesus says that following Him is not always easy! Jesus breathed His first breath on this earth with the smell of a stable, owning nothing. His last breaths before He died were desperate gasping, with everything owned taken from Him. To follow Him means to follow Him wherever He leads, even should it mean into homelessness and poverty.

While I have never been homeless, there have been times in my life that I have been displaced. A few years ago after the ice storm, I found that my Rectory was without power – and so without heat – for an extended period of time. A gracious family opened their house to me during this time, allowing me to enter, not only their home, but their hearts. I have heard countless other stories from parishioners during those years of major power outages, of how they were welcomed into others' homes. This sheltering of the homeless certainly came with inconveniences for all involved . . . but the stories of people unplugged, spending quality time with each other, loving each other, were memories they – and I – would not give up for all of the conveniences in the world!

The key was how they loved me. Though I did not recognize it at the time, in being displaced, I was bringing Jesus to this family – and they were able to minister to Jesus in me. It truly was an act of mercy. There are so many who are homeless not far from us – Lowell and Lawrence, Nashua and Manchester unfortunately have more than their quota of homeless. While we cannot take all (nor, in many cases, can we take any) into our homes, there are ways we can support homeless shelters and those who reach out to the poor.

An uncomfortable question arises, though (for me, as well) – Do we – do **I** – give money to charities, to homeless shelters, to those who work building houses in developing countries, etc., with the hope of mollifying our consciences? If that is the only reason we do so, it is, at its heart, a selfish act. Mercy requires acting with *love* toward the other, recognizing the inherent dignity in each person. Blessed Mother Teresa said,

**The biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for, deserted by everybody.**

How does our gift, our working to bring shelter to the homeless, help people to feel wanted? In a certain sense, that is the difference between being in a house and being in a home. The Work of Mercy helps people find a **home** . . . even if they do not have a permanent residence.