

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

We have begun the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy! I have spent a lot of time writing and speaking about how we are to receive God's infinite mercy in this Holy Year. There is more, though. We are not only called to receive mercy, but we are to be conduits of mercy to others. This is a very important part of this year. I have mentioned before the **Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy** (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, comfort the prisoners, visit the sick, bury the dead, teach the ignorant, pray for the living and the dead, correct sinners, counsel those in doubt, console the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive wrongs willingly). Over the next several weeks, I am going to look at the Works of Mercy, and how we can live them out in our lives.

First, why must we *do* Works of Mercy? You may remember Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35. In this story, a servant is forgiven a huge debt which he is unable to pay, but shortly afterward beats and puts into prison another servant who owes him a very little amount. The master, who forgave his debt, is then angered by his lack of mercy, "Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?" (Mt 18:33). This shows that showing mercy toward others is a necessary sign that we have *received* mercy. Mercy is not supposed to end with us, but must flow through us.

Sometimes we may look at another and say something like: "That person does not *deserve* mercy!" The funny thing about this is that **no one deserves mercy!** Mercy is an undeserved gift. If someone "deserved" mercy, it wouldn't be mercy that she received, but justice. Mercy is from the grace of God – that we don't deserve to be forgiven or reconciled to God, but He forgives us anyway, and calls us to His Heart. We must do likewise. As Jesus did what the Father does, so must we.

The **Works of Mercy** "are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2247). Just to clarify, when we in the Church use the word "charity," we are not talking about giving to the poor (though that could be an act of charity). Charity means love... love in action. This means that in order to do a Work of Mercy, we do not simply feed the poor, or shelter the homeless, or correct sinners. Rather, these actions must be *done with love* for the other, or else they are simply works for my own sake, not Works of Mercy.

In the definition, notice also that the Works of Mercy are not just for the physical good of the person – feeding, giving drink, etc. – but also for the spiritual good of the person. Sometimes these can be easy, but when it comes to bearing wrongs patiently and forgiving wrongs willingly, this can take a lot of effort and prayer on our part. The joyous thing is that no act of mercy goes unnoticed by our heavenly Father. He sees all – all of the effort, sacrifice and energy we put into being merciful to others – and He rewards our desire to be merciful to others with greater mercy to us.

So as we begin this Year of Mercy, let us look at the Works of Mercy and see: first, what are the areas we do well, and thank God for that grace; and second, where do we need to improve our love and mercy, and ask God for the grace to become merciful just as He is merciful.