

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Catechist: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Sponsor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Corporal & Spiritual WORKS OF MERCY

**Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>**

**NOTE:**

- CLASSES **WILL NOT MEET** on January 29<sup>th</sup>
- Students should go over this outline for the “*Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy*,” at home study session with their Sponsors (or parents if sponsor is not available). This outline is not intended as a student only lesson. It is expected that the student will have guidance and further explanation of the subject from the parent and/or sponsor.
- Refer to Catechism pages 646-649, *Love for the Poor*.
- Please complete the lesson and return a signed copy of this page to your Catechist by February 12, 2011.

*M*ercy is said to be a virtue influencing one's will to have compassion for and attempt to alleviate another's misfortune. St. Thomas Aquinas taught that although mercy is the spontaneous product of charity (love), it is to be reckoned a special virtue distinguishable from charity. It is considered more closely to resemble the quality of justice mainly because, like justice, it controls relations between distinct individuals. Mercy is motivated by the misery which one person sees in another, especially when this condition is perceived to be inflicted upon an innocent victim.

Read: The Parable of the Good Samaritan: Luke, Chap.10: 29-37

**Discussion Question:** *When you see a stranger, foreigner or enemy who is injured, what do you feel for them? Should it be your feelings that control your response to other people's hurts or your knowledge of right and wrong?*

The need to be succored can be either of body or soul. Therefore, the works of mercy include both the body (corporal) and soul (spiritual); we will list both corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The traditional rendering of the corporal works of mercy is as follows:

- To feed the hungry;
- To give drink to the thirsty;
- To clothe the naked;
- To harbor the harborless; (shelter the homeless)
- To visit the sick;
- To ransom the captive;
- To bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are:

- To instruct the ignorant;
- To counsel the doubtful;
- To admonish sinners;
- To bear wrongs patiently;
- To forgive offences willingly;
- To comfort the afflicted;
- To pray for the living and the dead.

*Succored: Defined as*

*aided, comforted,*

*supported or rescued.*

*The opposite of succor*

*is abandonment.*

The divisions of the works of mercy practically coincide with the various forms of almsgiving (works of charity). The word alms is a corruption of the Greek *elenmosyne* (mercy). To do works of mercy is not merely a matter of suggestion; there is a strict expectation by both natural and Divine law-- a "Command Performance" to act with mercy towards one another. The natural law that commands works of mercy is based upon the principle that we are to do to others as we would have them do to us. It is reasonable to expect to treat others well if we would like for them to reciprocate the action. (*What goes around, comes around!*)

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In the Old Testament, the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed God's desire for Mercy between men,

*(Isaiah 58) This rather, is the fasting that I wish; releasing those bound unjustly; untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them; and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like a dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed.*

The **Divine Command** is set forth in the most stringent of terms by Christ-- failure to comply with it is visited with the supreme penalty of *eternal damnation*.

*(Matthew 25:41): "Then he shall say to them also that shall be on his left hand: Depart from me, you cursed, in everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink. I was a stranger, and you took me not in; naked, and you covered me not; sick and in prison, and you did not visit me", etc.*

### What do I need to fulfill the Spiritual Works of Mercy?

The service Christ has assigned us in the Spiritual Works of Mercy is a complicated one. How can we instruct the ignorant if we ourselves are ignorant? How can we counsel the doubtful if we ourselves have no faith? We must build up and strengthen our own faith life and form our own consciences before we can offer to help others.

*(Matthew 7:3-5) Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye.*

*Let your conscience be your guide--* a good Catholic teaching as long as we have consciences that are formed and informed. How do we form our consciences? Five things!

1. Natural Law: God gave us reason so we can tell the difference between good and bad.
2. Ten Commandments: 10 Concrete applications of the natural law to help us where sin has darkened and confused us.
3. The Teachings of Jesus Christ: The Sermon on the Mount, his Last Supper discourse. Jesus outlines the fundamentals of Moral teaching, accepts us as co-heirs to his inheritance, he shares with us his spirit to complete our Trinitarian unity with God. He gives us our motivation to be moral and provides the grace to be good.
4. The Holy Spirit: the spirit convinces us of our sinfulness, converts us from it, and inspires us to act with goodness and compassion.
5. The Magisterium: Holy Mother Church in her role as teacher.

### **Am I My Brother's Keeper?**

Does God really expect us to admonish the sinner? Do I bear any responsibility for the sins of others when I stand by silently and watch them do wrong? Listen to the words God spoke to the Prophet Ezekiel.

(Ezekiel 33: 7-9) You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel; when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me. If I tell the wicked man that he shall surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked man from his way, he (the wicked man) shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death. But if you warn the wicked man, trying to turn him from his way, and he refuses to turn from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but you shall save yourself.

We do indeed bear a responsibility to our fellow man. We are not to stand by and watch them fall into sin and danger without speaking out. We all know that our parents would be angry if we allowed our brother or sister to do something dangerous and we did nothing to stop them. Likewise, our Heavenly Father, wants us to be equally concerned with saving our eternal life, we should speak out to our human brothers and sisters and warn them when they are in spiritual danger. *We are to speak the truth at all times.* (Commandment #8).

### **Treasuring Life**

God created this world for his children. He gave it to them with the same expectations that any parent has when they give their children something good. We are to care for it, use it wisely, and to share it with our fellow brothers and sisters when and where they need it as long as it will do them good and not harm. For instance, a ten-year old boy who receives a BB gun for Christmas should not share this gift with his three year old sister. But sharing his lunch with her if she is hungry, his coat or blanket with her if she is cold would not just be generous on his part, it would be expected out of common sense.

John the Baptist preached to the people how to change their lives and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. John wanted them to be able to stand justly before their God. He said, "if a man has two coats, he should share with the man who has none, and whoever has food should do likewise. (Luke 3:11)

The spiritual works of mercy call upon our common sense to care for life above material things, people above playthings. This is our call to justice and charity.

### **Keeping the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

*Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods.* If you have ever been around a two year old, you will see that most of them know only a few words. One of

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroys, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."*

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their favorite is “mine.” They want everything they see and they want it to be theirs. They will walk up to another child and take their toys right out of their hand and say “mine.” Usually this results in a lot of tears from both children and some parental correction. A two year old is not capable of understanding that he can’t have everything and he doesn’t need everything. He sees something, it looks good and he claims it. Within a minute he usually sees something else grabs that toy and has forgotten the first one even existed. This is the heart of covetousness. Thinking we need everything that looks good, shiny and new and is in the hands of someone else.

God wants us to view our possessions in terms of what we need, what is good for us and what will draw closer to him and to a better life. We must learn to put away our childishness and our selfishness.

**Temperance** is a virtue that guides us in pursuing and using material goods. Practicing temperance makes us the master of our possessions instead of allowing them to be our master. When we give materials things up for Lent, we are practicing the virtue of Temperance. We do this to show God that he is more important to us than material goods. **Greed** drives us to amass more wealth and possessions regardless of the needs of others. **Avarice** is the desire for wealth, position and power at any cost. Fraud, theft, and robbery are all results of avarice and sins against the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment.

### **Being Good Stewards**

God created us to enjoy this Earth. The right to own property and materials possessions that give us pleasure is natural and good. But with every right comes a responsibility. We must recognize our stewardship-- we hold these goods and wealth in our possession so that we can better our own lives and the lives of those people around us. Ownership of goods is meant for the common good of all and not merely for our own personal benefit. God calls us to share what we have with the poor and the needy.

### **Optional Service Projects:**

(Note: you must have your parent’s permission to participate in the projects listed below.)

1. Give to the poor something you own that you love, but don’t need. Every time that you miss that item say a little prayer to God, reminding him that you gave it up for him, because as much as you liked that “thing” you love God and your fellow man more!” You get 2 service hours. *(But you’ve got to really love it! )*
2. Shop for this week’s groceries and buy all your favorite foods, then bag them up and donate them to the food pantry! You get 2 service hours.