

logo©2004 by R Fulwiler

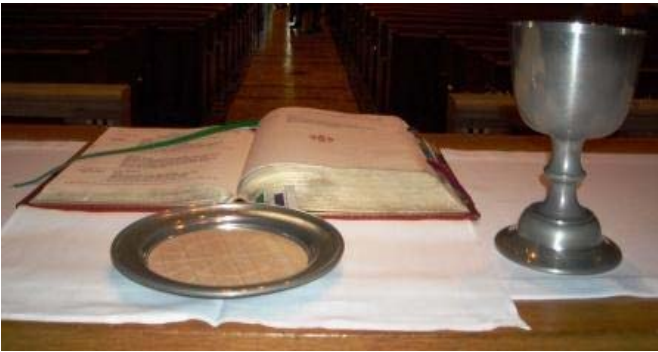
# Living as Catholic Christians: Works of Mercy

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

Text©2006 by Sandra A. Chakeres. All rights reserved.

Works of Mercy

## Works of Mercy



Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we are celebrating the new and everlasting covenant. And at the heart of that covenant is mercy. The Hebrew word for mercy is *hesed* – absolute love and mercy. *Hesed* is covenant love. It is the love God promised the Hebrew people, and in turn the love God promises us. But a covenant is a partnership. We in turn, as God's people, are to respond to God and God's people - our neighbors, our fellow humans – with this same absolute love and mercy. And we are

to do this not just some of the time, but at all times with all of our heart, mind and entire being.

What does living and breathing *hesed* look like? In practical terms, we are given a blueprint for *hesed* living in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy:

### The Corporal Works of Mercy

- \*Feed the hungry
- \*Give drink to the thirsty
- \*Clothe the naked
- \*Shelter the homeless
- \*Visit the sick
- \*Ransom the captive
- \*Bury the dead

### The Spiritual Works of Mercy

- \*Instruct the ignorant
- \*Counsel the doubtful
- \*Admonish the sinner
- \*Bear wrongs patiently
- \*Forgive sinners
- \*Comfort the afflicted
- \*Pray for the living and the dead



The Seven Works of Charity; Master of Alkmaar, 1504; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

The Scriptural basis for the Corporal Works of Mercy can be found in Matthew's Gospel. If you read the account of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, you will find Jesus' criteria for the judgment of the nations are the actions we now refer to as the Corporal Works of Mercy. The Spiritual Works of Mercy also are based in Scripture. For example, Isaiah 66:13 talks of comfort. In Colossians 3:13 we are told to bear with one another and forgive one another, while in Colossians 3:16, we are told to "teach and admonish one another." Galatians 6:1 tells us to correct someone caught in a transgression, and Galatians 6:2 instructs us to "bear one another's burdens." Jude 22 tells us to have mercy on "those who waver." Ephesians 6:18 tells us to "pray at every opportunity", and 2 Maccabees 12:38-46 references praying for the dead.

How, in our daily lives, do we live out these works of mercy? Are the works of mercy truly part of our way of life? Certainly we bring in canned goods for the food drive, and donate clothes to the Saint Vincent DePaul Society. But what about those in our community who are hungry for friendship and companionship? Do we look around on Sunday to see who at Mass is sitting alone and invite them to join us for Sunday dinner? What about those held captive by their fears and anxieties – how do we reach out to them? Perhaps we pray each day for the living and the dead, but how do we instruct the ignorant or admonish the sinner? How often do we just accept the status quo so as to not "rock the boat", rather than call someone to accountability?



**The Works of Mercy**  
David Teniers the Younger, Circa 1645  
Musée du Louvre, Paris, France

We are called to love God and love our neighbor. The truth is we cannot love God unless we love our neighbor – and that love is a covenant love. It is *hesed*. It is absolute love and mercy. It is knowing that we can be merciful to our neighbor, because the Lord has first been so merciful to us. We are merciful because we have been shown mercy.

Every day – at home, at school, at work, at church and at play – we live and breathe the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. We don't wait for the special times (the food and clothing drive, the project for Habitat for Humanity), nor do we show mercy for only a select few (our friends, family, fellow parishioners). We don't show mercy only when we feel like it. No, we strive to live lives of mercy every minute of every day because the all-merciful God has showered us with mercy.

In our call to live lives of mercy, perhaps we can join our Orthodox brothers and sisters in the repetitive "Jesus Prayer", *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner*.

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Teach us how to be merciful to others. Show us how to be faithful to the new and everlasting covenant.