

The God of Mercy Feeds the Hungry and Clothes the Naked

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(This is the first of a series of bulletin inserts provided by the Diocese of Gaylord for your prayer and reflection during this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy from December 8, 2015 to November 20, 2016.)

This Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy has two sides; one: to help us to better realize that God is truly the God of Mercy and to make that ever more clear to ourselves and to the whole world. The other side is for us to become ever more merciful ourselves.

Our reflections here are on Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy: "Feeding the Hungry" and "Clothing the Naked".

In truth all of us are the dirt poor; we are the hungry and the naked. Of ourselves we are nothing and have nothing. Everything we are and have, and will be and have, are pure gift from God. We are absolutely dependent on the mercy of God. Without God we are the destitute, the hungry, the naked. To feed and clothe us, the hungry and the naked, God in his great mercy created the plants, trees, animals, and the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve to till and enjoy. He sent the rain and the snow to provide life-giving water, and the sun for heat and photosynthesis. But sin entered the world with devastating consequences.

Our hunger now is for more than just for material food. We hunger for companionship as Adam for an Eve, for love, for meaning in life. Our nakedness now is not just being without material clothes but also without the clothes of virtue and truth, justice and righteousness.

We will never be able to solve all the vast and complicated problems of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked by ourselves. But where do we start even to work together in solidarity?

God did not, does not, abandon us. Having been made in the image and likeness of God Jesus tells us to strive to be perfect as God is perfect. God never asks us to do what he does not do, He has shown us the way through his own dealings with us. He asks us to share of what he has given us from his bounty to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Moreover, our greatest expressions of praise and gratitude to God for his infinite mercy towards us is our modeling of his mercy in our life, fulfilling and living out who we are called to be, that is: to be as merciful as God is merciful.

In feeding the hungry and clothing the naked our concern has to be more than food drives, food pantries, and soup kitchens; more than collections of winter coats, caps and mittens to give away to needy children, flooding a burned-out family with our no-longer wanted clothing to the point where they cannot handle the quantity, handing out clothing or bringing our used or out of date clothes to St. Vincent De Paul, Goodwill, or

the Salvation Army's thrifts stores and the like, important, well-meaning, and beautiful as these expression of caring can be and are.

We need to be concerned about the causes of hunger and the need to clothe the naked; why families cannot supply three meals a day, clean water, or provide shoes and warm clothing for their families. In most cases it is the result of poverty. Yes, there are droughts, natural disasters with destruction of land, crop, and distribution facilities. But there are also man-made causes of poverty: greed, the seeking of profits over persons, lack of living-wage jobs, raping of the land, ignoring the consequences of climate change, the misuse or misappropriation of land e.g. huge corporations obtaining large tracks of land to raise cash crops of little or no value to the displaced families, war and violence.

Following God's way, we, first of all, need to rejoice in the dignity and the beauty God sees in those unable to provide food and adequate clothing for themselves or their families, the reflection of God's own beauty and dignity. God looks upon them with tender mercy but does not pity them nor should we. Nor should we reach out to them just because it makes us feel good, or that we are somehow more blessed than they. Our feeding the hungry and clothing the naked is to be more than being caretakers; it means being companions, open to learning from them. The poorest of the poor in many way are the hardest of workers, the most giving. It means respecting them, enabling them to stand on their own feet, fostering their opportunity for further education and training;

Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked also embraces our care of the land and its climate; it embrace urban planning and restricting urban sprawl, giving and providing work with just and living wages, safe environments in which to work, health care, and allowing workers time to be with their families.

Bringing all of the above together. The most powerful and beautiful expression of God in his mercy caring for all, feeding the hungry, all of which we are called to live out in our own lives, we celebrate in Eucharist. At the last supper Jesus totally gave of himself. He laid everything on the table, his total self: his motives, thoughts, insights, his attitudes, values, his very life. He told us to eat and drink of him, to take it in, savor it, digest it and let it become ours, that we might be formed in his image and likeness,

The more we take on Jesus' mind, heart, and way of life, his total self-giving, the greater will be the foundation, the strength, we need to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked. To the extent we are self-giving, moving from zeroing in on ourselves to being loving and caring for others, the more we will be concerned and take action to provide jobs with just and living wages, care for the earth, change our polluting and climate changing ways, and strive to do all that is necessary to reduce poverty.