

Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

ADVISING THE DOUBTFUL

by: Rev. Michael Janowski

8th in a series— Diocese of Gaylord



The Corporal and Spiritual works of mercy are defined as works of charity done out of compassion or concern for those in distress or suffering. One of the spiritual works of mercy is *advising the doubtful*. All of us know someone who is struggling with their faith, perhaps dealing with doubts about the love and mercy that God has for them. Perhaps they feel God is disconnected from them or not tuned into their prayers and pleas for particular intentions, and when these prayers are not answered in the manner or timeline they expect, doubt begins to settle in as to whether God is really present to them. In my own particular ministry, I have sat with more than a few people who have experienced this for themselves. Some of them have clung to their faith and sought a deeper understanding of what is happening to them. Others have drifted from their faith and left the Church because of doubt in their lives. Ministering to ones such as these, first involves always listening and being present to them in compassionate ways in order to understand the burdens which cause their doubt. We must first have empathy and understanding for them before we can begin to advise or assist them in any way.

It is important to point out at this point that *advising the doubtful*, or any other Corporal or Spiritual Work of Mercy is not just for the clergy or religious to be involved in, but rather all of us who are baptized followers of Jesus. It is also important to note as well, that any work we do in terms of spiritual or corporal works flows not from our own abilities or skills, but rather from the grace of God who uses us as His instruments of love and mercy for all of us. Before we can begin to be an instrument of God's grace however, say to *advise the doubtful*, we first have to look within ourselves at our own relationship with God. Do we believe in the love and mercy that He has for us? Have we experienced that love and mercy in our own lives and can we reflect those experiences to others? Are we a people of deep faith and prayer, that even with the doubt that we experience in our own lives at times, we trust in the providence of God who is always present to us and providing for us.

Once we have sat and listened and have been present to those who are in need, we need to pray with them and pray for them. The grace of God always flows best through prayer as we ask for the Spirit of God to provide insight, wisdom and faith to all those who need it. Our quest is not to provide answers, solutions, or "*quick fixes*" to the problems that people face, but rather to point them to Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

In our prayer together with them and for them, we bring them to Jesus and we have the opportunity to bring the grace of God to them so that He may move minds and hearts to a deeper faith in Him.

In practical ways, we can support and affirm them by inviting them to come to church with us, especially if they have drifted from the faith. We can offer to continue to pray for them and walk by their side on their journey through turbulent times. We can point to others in the Gospel accounts like St. Thomas, who had his own doubts and concerns about Jesus and yet was privileged to see the Risen Christ who dispelled his doubts and fears.

All of us can experience the element of doubt at times in our faith lives. This is the work of the *evil one* who is always trying to sow the seeds of discord and division into our lives, attempting to separate us from God and from one another. Our task is to stay very close to Jesus in prayer who points the way for us in the Scriptures, in the Eucharist, in the Sacraments of the Church and in our common prayer together as we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” He says, “and those who live in me will not remain in darkness but will have the light of life.”*