

## Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

### CONVERTING SINNERS

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6<sup>th</sup> in a series– Diocese of Gaylord



In our world today, the sense of sin seems to be lost. People attempt to set freedom in opposition to truth, and indeed to separate them radically, is the consequence, manifestation and consummation of another more serious and destructive dichotomy, that which separates faith from morality. This separation represents one of the most acute pastoral concerns of the church amid today's growing secularism, wherein many, indeed too many, people think and live 'as if God did not exist' (Veritatis Splendor, 88)

The very life of the church is affected by this loss of the sense of sin, as St. Pope John Paul II indicated; "Even in the field of the thought of the church certain trends inevitably favor the decline of the sense of sin. For example, some are inclined to replace exaggerated attitudes of the past with other exaggerations: from seeing sin everywhere they pass to not recognizing it anywhere; from too much emphasis on the fear of eternal punishment they pass to preaching a love of God that excludes any punishment deserved by sin; from severity in trying to correct erroneous consciences they pass to a kind of respect for conscience which excludes the duty of telling the truth. (Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, 18)

Pope Pius XII in a radio message to the United States National catechetical Congress, October 26, 1946 commented that "the sin of the century is the loss of the meaning of sin." It is true because many people refuse to acknowledge sin as the source of evil's presence in the world, in the family, or in their personal lives. Many have little notion that sin involves the disruption of God's providential care for man and thereby harms the person. Others cannot overcome the sense of sin, which ultimately leads to misery, and so choose to reject the idea of sin or even God himself in their lives

Modern man has continuously turned away from the things of God by an excessive preoccupation with the things of this World. We are to arouse in them once again the desire for the love and truth which have been revealed to us by God through Christ. Through sincere and patient dialogue and a life of witness, we will be able to illuminate their hearts with the light of the gospel, set them free, and bring them once more under the dominion of God our father.

"All Christians by example of their lives and witness of the word, wherever they live, have an obligation to manifest the Christ which they put on in baptism, and to reveal the power of the Holy Spirit by whom they were strengthened at confirmation, so that

others, seeing their good works, might glorify the father who is in Heaven (Cf Matt. 5:16).” The principal duty of Christians is to bear witness to Christ, and this they are obliged to do by their life and their words, in the family, in their social groups, and in the sphere of their profession. Christians are to spread the faith of Christ among those with whom they are connected by social and professional ties and this obligation is all the more urgent.

In this Jubilee year of Mercy as always, I wish to add my own voice to the many voices out there to encourage us Christians to tighten our belt of commitment to a life of witness in our families, places of work, neighborhood, communities and churches. We are to bear witness to Christ with our words and deeds. We are to match our words with actions. We must show and tell the truth always and everywhere in love. In order to stimulate conversion in the lives of our brothers and sisters who choose to deliberately live in perpetual mortal sin, we must reach out to them wherever they are. We must not wait until we stumble over them or see them during celebration of weddings, funerals, birthday parties and the like. We are to seek for them. They are found in our immediate families, places of work, and communities.

God does not wish that anyone should perish, he has called you and I to carry his message of love, forgiveness and mercy to everyone especially to those who have lost the sense of sin. One of the Spiritual Works of Mercy is to admonish the sinner. To do this, it is important to note that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23). Therefore, if we must succeed in convincing a sinner about the danger of sin to his life, we must let him know that we too are sinners like him. We are sinners who always seek for forgiveness from the Lord whenever we realized we have sinned. In love and humility, we try to let him realize how bad sin is. We try to lead him to the sacrament of reconciliation and also, try to keep him out of an occasion of sin.

We may meet resistance from him but we can let him know directly or indirectly, especially by our exemplary life style, that God, the church and we do not approve of his actions. We should avoid displaying the “Holier than thou” attitude. Instead, we should put on the attitude of Jesus full of love, humility and truth. We should avoid sounding judgmental in our approach.

Also, there are Christians who come to church for Mass or attend Sunday service regularly but still live in mortal sin. They perform certain acts that lead them to commit mortal sin. Sometimes in their interaction with people, they share with them what they do and boast of the pleasures they derive from them. The feedback they get sometimes shock and offend them. They may be ignorant about what the church teaches regarding such acts. It is our duty to reach out to them to educate them so that they can learn the truths they need to know to save their lives. This is extremely pertinent today when so many people

are confused by what the church teaches on issues like contraception, abortion, homosexuality, pornography, masturbation, invitro fertilization, and etc.

Furthermore, some Christians choose to stop practicing their faith either because of the loss of loved ones or ill-health. Such people grieve in pains. They feel that God does not love them anymore. They find it difficult to come to terms with the reality of death or ill-health. So they get mad at God for their loss or ill-health. Such people choose to withdraw from anything to do with church and even interaction with people. They resolve to abandon God and seek for comfort and consolation elsewhere or in some things not helpful for their spiritual wellbeing. You and I have the duty to reach out to such people and help bring them back to Christ.

It is true that priests and lay faithful are very guilty of not giving much attention to the care of widows, widowers and the orphans among us. We hardly make time to find out how the bereaved in our parishes, families, neighborhood and communities are coping with grief. We, most of the time only show our solidarity with the bereaved when we try to attend the funeral Mass or service of the deceased. We hardly make phone calls after the funerals; the bereaved could easily be forgotten. Those among them who cannot understand why people die, they turn their backs at God and say he does not love them again. You and I are to be another Christ to them. So let us wake up from our slumber of “nonchalant attitude” and help bring back our brothers and sisters who have lost hope in God. Why not begin today by doing this-“Hello, I am ... I called to check on you, I hope you are OK. Try and locate where they live and reach out to them. There should be no more individualistic life instead a community life is to be promoted.

Visit the sick at home or hospital. You may be surprised to meet those who have lost hope in the healing touch of God or they are upset because they have terminal illness. They feel that God is not there for them. Seeing you by their sickbed and praying with them could restore their hope in God and possibly get healed. This could stimulate conversion in their hearts. Little gestures of pure love speak in volume of God’s love, care and mercy to people.

Another area where we do not seem to do so well is forgiving those who have wronged or injured us. If we must convince those we think live in mortal sin to repent, we must continuously lead by example.” By the fruits we bear, the World would know that we are Christ’s disciples.” We must be prompt to forgive those who wrong or injure us. This is the way to show those who live in sin that God our father is very prompt at forgiving those who sin against him. When we forgive people their wrongs, our relationship with them strengthens and we make peace with them. This will give us the confidence to talk about God’s forgiveness to those who seek him.

Use personal stories of forgiveness when helping people to repent of their sins. Use also the gospel stories of forgiveness such as the prodigal son in the gospel according to Luke which expresses in a simple but profound way the reality of conversion. Forgiveness is also exemplified by the narratives of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, the adulterous woman, the Good thief, the Samaritan woman, and the public sinner who is forgiven much because she loved much. (Cf Elk. 19:1-10; Jan 8:1-11; Elk. 23:42-43; Jan 4:4-42; Elk. 7:36-50). There are, then, no lost causes for Christ who came to seek and to save the lost.

The call to conversion is a key in Jesus' public ministry. He began his public ministry by calling people to repentance, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel. It should be our theme every blessed day as his disciples sent to help others come back to him. (Lk 19:10)

People should see us promote justice and peace by living out daily. They should be able to see the genuineness of our discipleship. Our discipleship should be able to stand the test of our time. As Jesus would say, let our yes always be yes, anything short of that comes from evil.

Our attitude should not be like that of the Pharisee in Luke 7:39 who said to the sinful woman in the city who came to see Jesus in his house, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner."

Conversion is the radical reorientation of one's whole life away from sin and evil and toward God. This is the central element of Christ's preaching, of the Church's ministry of evangelization, and of the sacrament of reconciliation. This should be our "watch word" every moment of our life and therefore, work toward it.

Finally, today, in a period of history in which the reality of sin is being denied and a general indifference to moral evil prevails, it is particularly important that the Christian strives to be Christ like in his conduct among others. Christians, by virtue of baptism, have a mission to be witnesses to the truth. Sin has always existed, and Christ will always be there to forgive sinners and bring them back. The surest way to evangelize others is to strive to imitate Christ in all actions. Through God's grace, personal holiness is possible for all faithful members of the church.

However, personal holiness first requires personal conversion to a greater union with Christ and a greater desire and commitment to reject one's sinful ways. This is what we should help others do, to reject what is sinful.