

Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy
BURY THE DEAD AND COMFORT THE SORROWING

by: Rev. Leonard Paul
5th in a series– Diocese of Gaylord



In his loving and gracious mercy the Lord has commanded me to comfort those who are in sorrow. I must try to hear this command and obey it with loving mercy and feeling. Many years ago in another place far away I was called to do the funeral service for a new born baby. At the end of the prayers the young mother began to sob softly and said, “I don’t want to put it in the ground.” Her young husband was sitting next to her at the cemetery. As I recall he said nothing but put his arm around her and gently drew her to himself. I said just a few words to her but I encouraged her husband to be strong for her. I said little because there was nothing I could have said that would have been as comforting or eloquent as what her young husband did. It is difficult for us men to know what a mother experiences when her child dies because we have not carried a child within us. Words are not always needed. A firm embrace of love may be the comfort we can give to a sorrowing woman. Those in sorrow may need a man of strength to lean upon. Women often find that soothing words come to them more easily. Genuine tears are not out of order.

Many years ago I was at a gathering at a home for a party following the reception of a sacrament. As I was sitting quietly observing everyone a young boy drew near to his father. The boy had a sad look on his face. His father was sitting in a chair but bent down to be more at the child’s height. The father talked very softly and as in the case above, put his arm around the boy. I could not hear what was troubling the child but his father continued to speak to him for some time. The boy did not suddenly light up with joy but he certainly had the confidence to speak of his sorrow to his father. Sometimes we who are not sorrowing lose sight of the sorrow of others. In the case of sorrowing children, it is all too easy to not understand that small matters

have a different size for small bodies. Our Father does not fail to give us consolations. Should we not do likewise?

BURY THE DEAD

My friend, Cordelia, has died. Now I am called to attend her funeral. I am so sad that she will no longer be a part of my life here on earth. I shall miss her very much. When I think of her life, I sometimes have a fleeting thought of her shortcomings but the thought does not linger in my mind. I quickly and effortlessly recall her many wonderful deeds of kindness and generosity. The thought of those deeds fills my soul with admiration and tranquility. I feel a glow in the remembrance of her. As I continue to think of her burial, I have that bittersweet sensation of Christian death: the sorrow of my loss – the joy in the knowing of her eternal happiness. I would never have wanted to delay her entry into eternal bliss by anything I might have said or done. It is such a blessing to pray for her soul, now separated from her body. May she rest in peace! I bury her in prayer with confidence in the abundant mercy of the Lord.

A call came for me today to say that my brother, Alexander, has died. The Lord will expect me to do all that I can. I know that others have faced the same prospect of burying someone whose life has been difficult. I reflect especially on the thoughts of those who must give a Christian burial to someone who has committed suicide. How powerful and compelling is the call to speak of the Lord's mercy. I trust, as I know others must also trust, in the wonder of the Lord's love and mercy that never abandons us. When I have been called to speak to others of burying their dead, I know it has been a challenge to find the right words. I return time and again to speak of the boundless mercy of the Lord. In the death and burial of the faithful it is easy to bury with serenity and hope. In the death of those who have struggled it is necessary to bury with mercy and hope. Hope seems to be required at all times. So, I bury my brother, Alex with the hope to see him at peace and happy at the heavenly banquet. The body goes into the ground; the soul ascends into heaven.