

Ash Wednesday

Mercy is one of the great themes of the ministry of Pope Francis. He has made this a holy year of mercy. Recently the pope lamented that few people are able to name the seven corporal works of mercy revealed by Jesus and promoted in our catechism. You can find reflections on them on the web site of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Here they are with some suggestions:

1. Feed the hungry. Our Knights of Columbus are challenging each of us to provide 40 cans of food this Lent. You may place donated canned goods on the table by the Sacred Heart altar. The Knights will distribute them to food pantries.

2. Give drink to the thirsty. Do not waste water at home when brushing your teeth or showering. Contribute to Catholic Relief Service, which builds wells for those in need. Our annual second collection for them will be on the Fourth Sunday of Lent.

3. Shelter the homeless. Contact your representatives in congress to support legislation that welcomes refugees fleeing from violence in other nations. Meet the refugee families who come to church at St. Anthony's. Support the work of A Simple House and Jerusalem Farm, who minister to the homeless and those who need home repair.

4. Visit the sick. Give time to a nursing home. Visit a sick relative or friend. Give blood. Bring a meal to a family with someone sick at home.

5. Visit the prisoners. Contact our diocesan office of prison ministry and start volunteering. Write letters to someone in prison. This is probably the hardest one of all the corporal works of mercy because of the effort it takes.

6. Bury the dead. Participate in funeral rites in homes, funeral homes, churches and cemeteries. Visit the tombs of your deceased relatives and friends. If you still have ashes of a cremated loved one at home, bury the dead. Arrange a burial at a public cemetery. Plan your own funeral and talk to your family.

7. Give alms to the poor. Find a charity that is meaningful to you and give. If you are eating and drinking less this Lent, then share your savings with those who have less. Help our youth group collect winter hats and gloves.

St. Paul tells the Corinthians that we are all ambassadors for Christ. He became like us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Then he quotes the words God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to a people who had been crying out for mercy: "In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." Paul says in his own words, "Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation."

The Catholic Church gives us this reading every year on Ash Wednesday to call us to observe the entire season of Lent. When we perform works of mercy for others, this becomes an acceptable time for us and for them. We become ambassadors of God's mercy. We prepare the earth for the flowers of Easter. This Lent in this year of mercy is an acceptable time. Let us practice mercy at home and with our neighbor in a special way these forty days of Lent.