



## WORKS OF MERCY

The Charitable  
Actions of Christ



# Responding to a Needy and Broken World

BY REV. BRIAN MULLADY, O.P.

*This article is the first in a series examining the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy as an expression of the New Evangelization.*

Pope Francis has renewed the call of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to a “New Evangelization.” The cornerstone of this New Evangelization must be doctrinal. But this is hardly sufficient to move the Church out to influence the world today. Though concern for learning the truths of the Faith is central, it would be incomplete without an equally important witness to what those truths contain by practice. This practice cannot be confined to a sort of “in-house Church” that is characterized by spending a good deal of effort merely on the problems of maintaining the institution. The New Evangelization must thrust the Church out to witness to the world.

Orthodoxy must cause orthopraxis. The Church must practice what is preached within the institution itself. Christ’s example is foundational in this bold conviction. The Church is called by Pope Francis to be merciful as Our Lord was merciful to us, fallen humanity.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis sets out a comprehensive program to realize this goal. This program is his take on what are more traditionally referred to as the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. One way the Holy Father states his goal is:

To sustain a lifestyle which ex-

cludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own (no. 54).

*The Church is called  
to be merciful  
as Our Lord  
was merciful  
to us, fallen humanity.*

The globalization of indifference cannot be reconciled with the Gospel of the One who came to cast fire on the earth (cf. Lk 12:49). That spiritual fire demands a commitment to truth, mercy, charity and justice. The Church has always been solicitous to emphasize this. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it well:

The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of

mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God: He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none and he who has food must do likewise (cf. Lk 3:11). But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you (cf. Lk 11:41). If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?” (Jas 2:15-16; 1 Jn 3:17) (CCC, no. 2447).

As followers of Christ wanting to respond to Pope Francis’ urgent call, we ought to examine more closely the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. In this way we will come to a better understanding of how these charitable expressions of Christ can be visible manifestations of Our Lord’s merciful love to a needy and broken world.✠