

COMPASSION JUSTICE RESPECT HOPE



Prayer Resource

FOR MEETINGS DURING THE YEAR 2017

*an **open** heart ...*

*a **patient** heart ...*

*a **hopeful** heart ...*

*a **forgiving** heart ...*

*a **compassionate** heart ...*

USING THESE PRAYER RESOURCES

Prayer is essential at the commencement of all meetings for focus, to reinforce Catholic identity and to call God's blessings on the proceedings. Prayer time is also formative as it allows those present to examine aspects of life, faith and experience.

The prayers in this package focus on the Spiritual Works of Mercy and their application personally and communally within Catholic organisations.

The structure of each prayer is the same:

- **A quote, picture or other focus for gathering** – quiet background music is recommended for this part of the prayer or the lighting of a candle. A focus question has been included. (Allow 3 to 5 minutes for this section).
- **A scripture or other chosen reading** is provided with a short conceptual or contextual statement if needed. Once the reading has been shared, a few minutes of quiet contemplation should be allowed for focus on the reflection questions. (Allow 3 to 5 minutes for this section).
- **A sharing of responses which is critical for formation** and the development of a community of prayer. Leaders should stress that reflection time is not commentary on the thoughts of others but simply a time to share what ideas or thoughts the questions and readings have raised. (Allow 7 to 10 minutes for this section).
- **Prayer** which can be led by one of the participants or said together. At this time, any specific prayer intentions or remembrances could be included. (Allow 3 to 5 minutes for this section).

Depending on the level of sharing it is estimated that these reflections will take 15 to 25 minutes. They are offered as a guide to the Spiritual Works of Mercy and can be supplemented with additional readings or other ritual elements such as the use of oil for anointing, the sprinkling of water, a sign of peace or other symbolic actions.

Like the open door in Joyce Rupp's reflection (Prayer 1), prayer and sharing are a catalyst for change.

They let in the Spirit of wisdom, presence, thanksgiving and communion.

They invite participants to open their hearts to new ways of seeing and understanding.

They bring God to the forefront of the meeting: its business, concerns, challenges and interactions.

**LET US NOT BE CLOSED TO THE NEWNESS THAT GOD WANTS TO BRING INTO OUR LIVES ...
MERCY IS THE LORD'S MOST POWERFUL MESSAGE ... (POPE FRANCIS)**

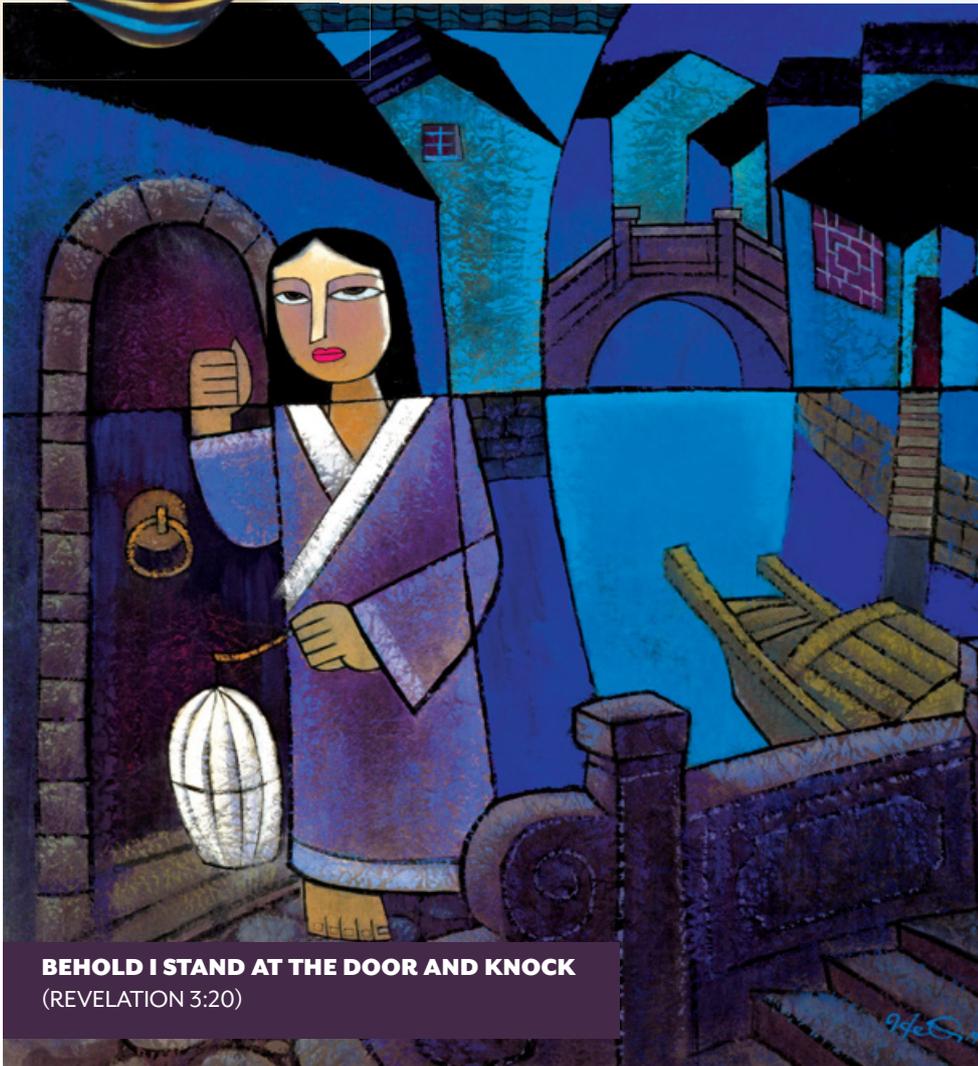
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for your Board: www.mercypartners.org.au/prayer-resources

Nurturing a Merciful Heart



GATHERING

There are many calls on our time, energy and resources. Sometimes we might long for peace and quiet, time alone or a less busy lifestyle. But God's call to mercy is ever present, stirring us from within, knocking loudly on the barriers we erect, creeping into our quieter moments.



BEHOLD I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK
(REVELATION 3:20)

FOR QUIET REFLECTION

What door is God knocking on for you at this time?

READING

When we open the door and go inside, God is there in the temple of our soul, in the ashram of our heart, in the cathedral of our being. Which is not to dismiss the reality of this same loving presence being fully alive in our external world. The Holy One is with us in all of life. Our purpose for opening the door inward is to help us know and claim who we are, so we can more completely join with God in expressing this love in every part of our external world. (Joyce Rupp)

DISCUSSION

Read the Spiritual Works of Mercy on the back of the prayer sheet.
How do these calls for a merciful attitude and approach to relationships inform and challenge your work?

PRAYER (PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

God of mercy and compassion

Be with us as we journey together.

Help us to discern your call to be hearts of mercy in our place and time.

Bless our decisions, our directions, our challenges.

Help us to carry the banner for a different view of life – one which honours the God presence in all people and promotes love, compassion and hope.

Amen

BEING MERCY

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

Comfort the sorrowful

Awareness of the needs of others

Being present and listening

Openness to being leaned upon in times of hurt and sadness

Acceptance of the reality of tragedy and sorrow

Counsel the Doubtful

Cultivating a hopeful heart

Valuing listening and presence

Affirming others whenever possible

Instruct the uninformed

Valuing education as an agent of transformation

Respecting learning as a lifelong process

Knowing who you are and what you believe and modelling this for others

Warn the sinner

Being a model of opposition to injustice, cruelty, greed and intolerance

Embracing respect, honesty and integrity

Avoiding situations of moral compromise

Bear wrongs patiently

Allowing personal vulnerability and openness to hurt

Accepting mistakes as a normal part of life

Looking for the positive in all situations and all people

Refusing to take to heart the negative actions or opinions of others

Forgive all injuries

Giving others and self the room to make mistakes

Valuing relationships

Avoiding retribution thinking

Understanding the danger of nursing hurts

Pray for the living and the dead

Being other-centred

Heart –remembering and mindfulness

Modelling the power of prayer

Contemplate God's world gratefully

Being open to God's teaching in each created thing

Valuing the natural world and promoting ecological action

Awareness of personal carbon footprints

Spending time in prayer and contemplation of Earth's beauty



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COMPASSION JUSTICE RESPECT HOPE



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1. Comfort the Sorrowful



GATHERING

Who are the sorrowful in our society?

Sorrow has many faces and many sources. The fact that our society has an epidemic of depression and other emotional disorders suggests that we are often out of touch with our own feelings and those things which can bring lasting happiness. Many people suffer in silence. The person we meet each day: at work or in the neighbourhood might be carrying enormous sorrow. This challenges us to practise kindness to all we meet and to be open to helping when needed; to always remember the power of a word, a smile or a gesture.

READING

There was much sorrow among Jesus' followers over his death. Hopes were dashed, teachings rendered seemingly empty, a cloud of despair settled over those who had been with Jesus throughout his ministry.

Jesus said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

He asked them, "What things?"

They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

... As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening

FOR QUIET REFLECTION

How can you be a person of hope in your place?



and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:13-32)

DISCUSSION

How can this ministry be a model of comfort for others?
Are there sorrows within this organisation which need addressing?

PRAYER

(PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

God of mercy and comfort

May we be Emmaus people, conscious of your love and presence among us.

Give us hearts of mercy to reach out, support and comfort others.

Remind us of the transformational impact of acts of kindness and compassion.

Amen

A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. (Pope Francis)

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2. Council the Doubtful



GATHERING

Everyone has moments of doubt. Life experiences often rock our confidence: illness, loss of work, relationship stress and tragedy. Just the everyday pressures of an ever changing world can sap energy and induce doubtfulness. How do we deal with our own doubts and the doubts of others?

FOR QUIET REFLECTION

What can we learn from Jesus about dealing with the doubts and hurts of others?



READING

Thomas the disciple of Jesus is often called 'Doubting Thomas' because in his grief he couldn't believe that Jesus had risen. This story reminds us that doubts are normal and that Jesus' response (patience) is a merciful one – he didn't close the door on Thomas but reached him through his own woundedness.

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord."

But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:24-27)

DISCUSSION

What aspects of doubtfulness does this ministry face in its work?

PRAYER

(PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

God of mercy and comfort

Strengthen us in our work.

May we have patient hearts with the doubts of others, compassionate hearts for mission in our world and open hearts to our own needs for information and support.

Give us the courage to live with paradox and the strength to address those challenges which unsettle us and threaten to steer us off course.

Amen

Jesus' attitude is striking: we do not hear the words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversation ... (Pope Francis)

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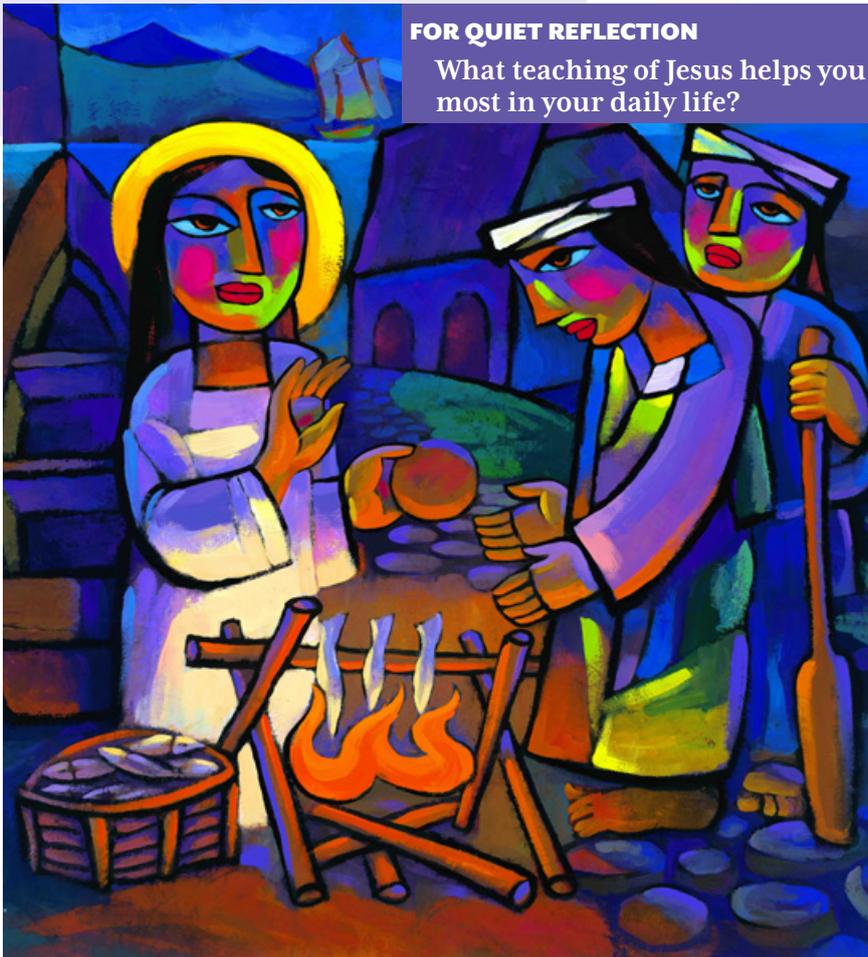
3. Instruct the Uninformed



GATHERING

What does it mean to be uninformed?

There are social, personal, cultural and spiritual aspects of being uninformed: conventions and ways of behaving which are not understood; lack of insight; deliberate misinformation or deception; lack of opportunity for education or inculturation; blindness and rigid certainty.



FOR QUIET REFLECTION

What teaching of Jesus helps you most in your daily life?

READING

What did Jesus Teach?

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” (Matthew 25:31)

And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”. (Matthew 18:3)

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

“These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (Matthew 15:8)

DISCUSSION

Who is your organisation called to instruct?
What aspects of being uninformed are evident in your work and ministry?

PRAYER (PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

God of mercy and wisdom
Keep our hearts and minds grounded in the teaching of your son Jesus.
May we be always mindful of the need for leadership, role modelling and advocacy for gospel values.
Help us to be hearts and voices of mercy in our world.
Amen

Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think – and I say it with humility – that this is the Lord’s most powerful message: mercy ... (Pope Francis)

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He Q
2013

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4. Warn the Sinner



GATHERING

It is regarded as culturally inappropriate to criticise others for faults and sinfulness. This type of activity is often seen as hypocrisy or moral righteousness. Our behaviour, on the other hand, always speaks so much louder than words and there are many instances where others take behavioural cues from us. This is how cultures – both positive and negative – are built. We can all warn the sinner through modelling just, compassionate and kind behaviour to others.

READING

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a well-known story of mercy and compassion. The story suggests that the onus of mercy is on all of us and our behaviour toward those most vulnerable is a sign of a merciful heart.

... then a lawyer ... asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

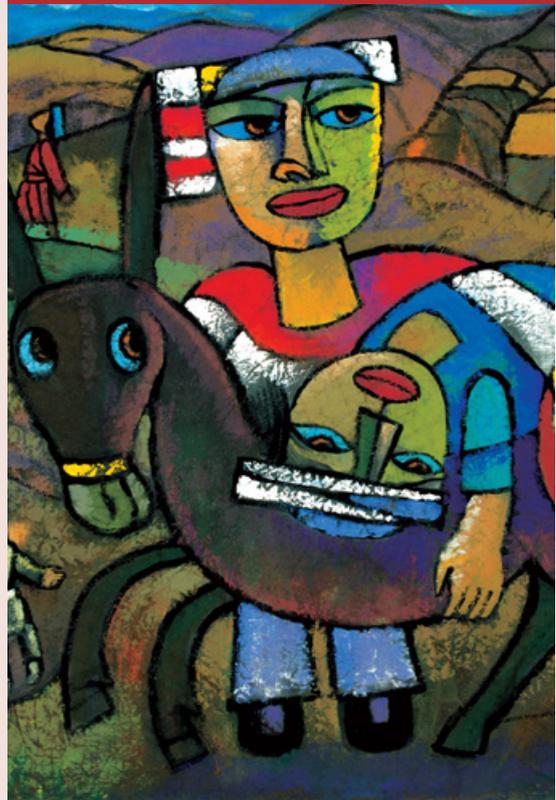
Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend’.

‘Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’

He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise’. (Luke 10:25)

FOR QUIET REFLECTION

What values do you model in your response to others?



DISCUSSION

When and how can an organisation step up in circumstances of injustice, misinformation or unkindness?

PRAYER

(PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

God of the story

Remind us that our actions mirror our beliefs and values;

that our deeds are always more important than words;

that cultural change begins with us

and that how we treat others has a ripple effect across an organisation and society more broadly.

Give us the courage to address wrongs when they confront us.

Amen

Give us the courage to correct and affirm through our example. Situations can change; people can change. Be the first to seek to bring good. Do not grow accustomed to evil, but defeat it with good. (Pope Francis)

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5. Bear Wrongs Patiently



GATHERING

To be wronged – hurt, undermined, betrayed, ignored, unfairly criticized or slandered – is not an easy thing to accept with patience. This Spiritual Work of Mercy is very challenging and calls for a deeper awareness of relationship and God's presence in all people. It also reminds us that most situations in life are unfinished, incomplete or flawed. This is the human condition. Gentleness with others, especially those who hurt us, can transform relationships.

READING

The angels ask a seemingly perplexing question. They remind us that remaining in darkness is a choice and Christians are called to transformation in their relationship with God and each other.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." (Luke 24:1-5)

Thomas Merton reinforces the importance of resurrection thinking in a life of hope and mercy.

Let us not then darken the joy of Christ's victory by remaining in captivity and in darkness, but let us declare his power, by living as free men (and women) who have been called by Jesus out of darkness into his admirable light.

FOR QUIET REFLECTION

How do you react when you perceive yourself wronged?
When have you been a resurrection thinker?



DISCUSSION

How can we build cultures of care, respect and forgiveness in our workplace, family and society?

PRAYER

(PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

God of patience and mercy
Enable us to rise above hurts and grudges.
Nurture in us positive relationships and a spirit of forgiveness
Bless us in our striving for peace.
Amen.

The language of the Spirit, the language of the Gospel, is the language of communion that invites us to get the better of closedness and indifference, division and antagonism. (Pope Francis)

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**MERCY
PARTNERS**

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6. Forgive Offences Willingly



GATHERING

The core word here is ‘willingly’. We all know Jesus’ teaching to forgive not just once but many times, but sometimes our forgiveness is conditional or grudging. True forgiveness takes courage and sensitivity to the needs of the other. Our forgiving God gives us the template and possibility of forgiveness.

READING

Ron Rolheiser reflects on why this work of mercy is so challenging for all of us and how we find true forgiveness difficult. He Qi captures the act of forgiveness in his depiction of the iconic Prodigal Son story.

The most damaging idolatry is not the golden calf but enmity against the other.” The renowned anthropologist, Rene Girard, wrote that and its truth is not easily admitted. Most of us like to believe that we are mature and big-hearted and that we do love our neighbours and are free of enmity towards others. But is this so?

In our more honest, more accurately perhaps, in our more humble moments, I think that all of us admit that we don’t really love others in the way that Jesus asked. We don’t turn the other cheek. We don’t really love our enemies. We don’t wish good to those who wish us harm. We don’t bless those who curse us. And we don’t genuinely forgive those who murder our loved ones. We are decent, good-hearted persons, but persons whose heaven is still too-predicated on needing an emotional vindication in the face of anyone or anything that opposes us. We can be fair, we can be just, but we don’t yet love the way Jesus asked us to, that is, so that our love goes out to both those who love us and to those who hate us. We still struggle, mightily, mostly unsuccessfully, to wish our enemies well.

The Irish Jesuit, Michael Paul Gallagher ... puts this well when he writes, “You probably don’t hate anyone, but you

FOR QUIET REFLECTION

Are there people or situations you find hard to forgive?
How can you open a door of forgiveness in these situations?



can be paralysed by daily negatives. Mini-prejudices and knee-jerk judgements can produce a mood of undeclared war. Across barbed wire fences, invisible bullets fly.” Loving the other as oneself, he submits, is for most of us an impossible uphill climb (Rolheiser 2016 – the full text of the article is included at the end of the resource).

DISCUSSION

How do forgiveness and reconciliation manifest themselves in your work?

PRAYER

(PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

God of forgiveness and mercy.
Help us to be willing.
Willing to set aside hurts and grudges.
Willing to embrace difference. Willing to forgive.
Willing to acknowledge our own faults.
Willing to be compassionate hearts for mercy in our world.
Amen.

Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven. (Pope Francis)

BEING MERCY

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*Being other-centred
Heart-remembering and mindfulness
Modelling the power of prayer*

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7. Pray for the Living and the Dead



GATHERING

Prayer can be seen as an act of solidarity, care, gratitude and compassion, asking God's love to embrace those about whom we are concerned. Prayer can also be a response to difficult times. Prayer for the dead is an act of heart-remembering and love.



FOR QUIET REFLECTION

For whom do you need to pray?

READING

Esther was a young Jewish woman chosen to be the queen of the King of Persia. The hand of God is evident in Esther's story as she obtained grace and favour in the king's sight (Esther 2:17) and interceded for her people (despite danger to herself) when the King set out to destroy them (Esther 4:8). Esther provides an example of an intercessor who shows both clarity of purpose and faith in God through prayer. Esther also understood the need to allow time and space for God's action in the heart of the other.

Mordecai instructed Esther to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold sceptre to them and spares their lives.

DISCUSSION

How important is prayer in the life of your organisation?

PRAYER

(PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

Let's call to mind those people, living and dead, who are close to our hearts.

Wrap your love, Compassionate God, around our friends and family.

Be with our colleagues and those we meet in our daily life.

Comfort those we know who are grieving.

Bless those we find difficult.

May we, like Esther, never give up in our petitions for our people.

Amen.

In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could lead to a hardness of heart, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of the boundless love of God, in order to experience God's tenderness. (Pope Francis)

BEING MERCY

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

Comfort the sorrowful

Awareness of the needs of others

Being present and listening

Openness to being leaned upon in times of hurt and sadness

Acceptance of the reality of tragedy and sorrow

Counsel the Doubtful

Cultivating a hopeful heart

Valuing listening and presence

Affirming others whenever possible

Instruct the uninformed

Valuing education as an agent of transformation

Respecting learning as a lifelong process

Knowing who you are and what you believe and modelling this for others

Warn the sinner

Being a model of opposition to injustice, cruelty, greed and intolerance

Embracing respect, honesty and integrity

Avoiding situations of moral compromise

Bear wrongs patiently

Allowing personal vulnerability and openness to hurt

Accepting mistakes as a normal part of life

Looking for the positive in all situations and all people

Refusing to take to heart the negative actions or opinions of others

Forgive all injuries

Giving others and self the room to make mistakes

Valuing relationships

Avoiding retribution thinking

Understanding the danger of nursing hurts

Pray for the living and the dead

Being other-centred

Heart –remembering and mindfulness

Modelling the power of prayer

Contemplate God's world gratefully

Being open to God's teaching in each created thing

Valuing the natural world and promoting ecological action

Awareness of personal carbon footprints

Spending time in prayer and contemplation of Earth's beauty



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8. Contemplate God's World Gratefully

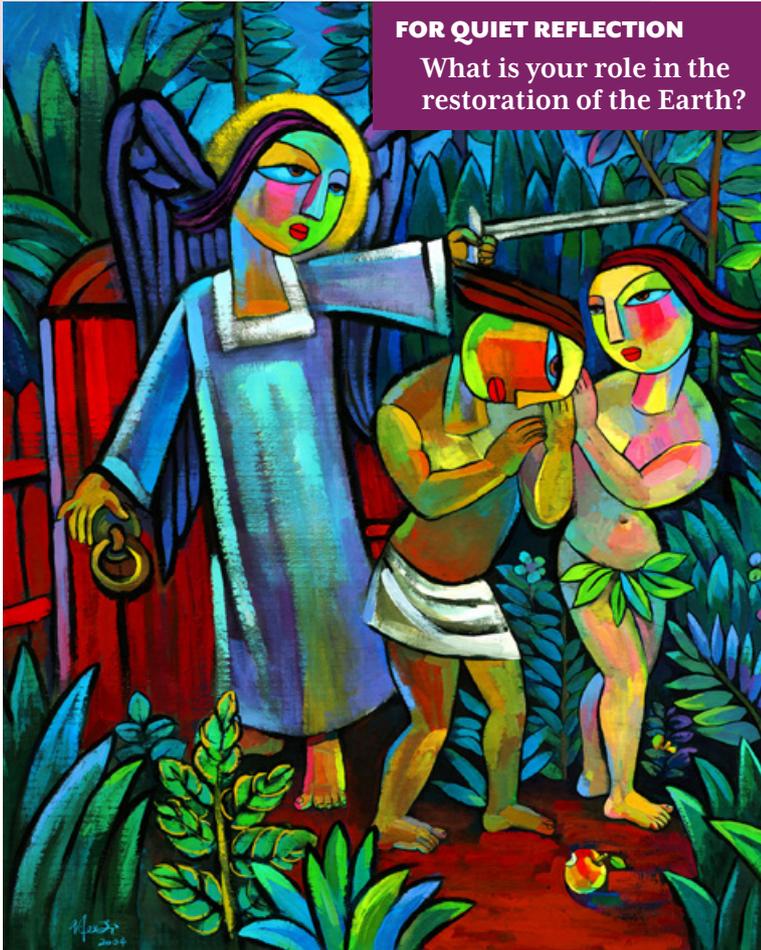


GATHERING

Pope Francis recently declared two new Works of Mercy – one corporal and one spiritual. Both concern care for the environment. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis described ‘... the earth herself burdened and laid waste as among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor ... she groans in travail’ (Romans 8:22)... He reminds us that ‘we ourselves are dust of the Earth (Genesis 2:7) our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.’

FOR QUIET REFLECTION

What is your role in the restoration of the Earth?



READING

He Qi's artwork shows the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden which can be seen as the rupture between people and the natural world – the loss of Eden. In the Book of Revelation, there is a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. This restoration signifies, metaphorically, the ideal of a world in harmony.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city ... They will see God's face, and God's name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

DISCUSSION

How is respect for the Earth and the natural environment lived out in your work?

PRAYER

(PAUSE FOR ANY SPECIAL INTENTIONS)

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,

That we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

Amen. (From *Laudato Si'*)

Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity.

Cowardice in defending it is a grave sin. (Pope Francis)

BEING MERCY

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

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*Being other-centred
Heart-remembering and mindfulness
Modelling the power of prayer*

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*Being open to God's teaching in each created thing
Valuing the natural world and promoting ecological action
Awareness of personal carbon footprints
Spending time in prayer and contemplation of Earth's beauty*



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The Struggle to Love our Neighbour



By Ron Rolheiser OMI

“The most damaging idolatry is not the golden calf but enmity against the other.” The renowned anthropologist, Rene Girard, wrote that and its truth is not easily admitted. Most of us like to believe that we are mature and big-hearted and that we do love our neighbours and are free of enmity towards others. But is this so?

In our more honest, more accurately perhaps, in our more humble moments, I think that all of us admit that we don't really love others in the way that Jesus asked. We don't turn the other cheek. We don't really love our enemies. We don't wish good to those who wish us harm. We don't bless those who curse us. And we don't genuinely forgive those who murder our loved ones. We are decent, good-hearted persons, but persons whose heaven is still too-predicated on needing an emotional vindication in the face of anyone or anything that opposes us. We can be fair, we can be just, but we don't yet love the way Jesus asked us to, that is, so that our love goes out to both those who love us and to those who hate us. We still struggle, mightily, mostly unsuccessfully, to wish our enemies well.

But for most of us who like to believe ourselves mature that battle remains hidden, mostly from ourselves. We tend to feel that we are loving and forgiving because, essentially, we are well-intentioned, sincere, and able to believe and say all the right things; but there's another part of us that isn't nearly so noble. The Irish Jesuit, Michael Paul Gallagher, (who died recently and will be dearly missed) puts this well when he writes (*In Extra Time*): “You probably don't hate anyone, but you can be paralysed by daily negatives. Mini-prejudices and knee-jerk judgements can produce a mood of undeclared war. Across barbed wire fences, invisible bullets fly.” Loving the other as oneself, he submits, is for most of us an impossible uphill climb.

So where does that leave us? Serving out a life-sentence of mediocrity and hypocrisy? Professing to loving our enemies but not doing it? How can we profess to be Christians when, if we are honest, we have admit that we are not measuring up to the litmus-test of Christian discipleship, namely, loving and forgiving our enemies?

Perhaps we are not as bad as we think we are. If we are still struggling, we are still healthy. In making us, it seems, God factored in human complexity, human weakness, and how growing into deeper love is a life-long journey. What can look like hypocrisy from the outside can in fact be a pilgrimage, a Camino walk, when seen within a fuller light of patience and understanding.

Thomas Aquinas, in speaking about union and intimacy, makes this important distinction. He distinguishes between being in union with something or somebody in actuality and being in union with that someone or something through desire. This has many applications but, applied in this case; it means that sometimes the heart can only go somewhere through desire rather than in actuality.

We can believe in the right things and want the right things and still not be able to bring our hearts inside. One example of this is what the old catechisms (in their unique wisdom) used to call “imperfect contrition”, that is, the notion that if you have done something wrong that you know is wrong and that you know that you should feel sorry for, but you can't in fact feel sorry for, then if you can wish that you could feel sorry, that's contrition enough, not perfect, but enough. It's the best you can do and it puts you at the right place at the level of desire, not a perfect place, but one better than its alternative. And that “imperfect” place does more for us than simply providing the minimal standard of contrition needed for forgiveness. More importantly it accords rightful dignity to whom and to what we have hurt.

Reflecting on our inability to genuinely love our neighbour, Marilynne Robinson submits that, even in our failure to live up to what Jesus asks of us, if we are struggling honestly, there is some virtue. She argues this way: Freud said that we cannot love our neighbour as ourselves, and no doubt this is true. But since we accept the reality that lies behind the commandment, that our neighbour is as worthy of love as ourselves, then in our very attempt to act on Jesus' demand we are acknowledging that our neighbour is worthy of love even if, at that this point in our lives, we are too weak to provide it.

And that's the crucial point: In continuing to struggle, despite our failures, to live up to Jesus' great commandment of love we acknowledge the dignity inherent in our enemies, acknowledge that they are worthy of love, and acknowledge our own shortcoming. That's “imperfect” of course, but, I suspect, Thomas Aquinas would say it's a start!

Source: Ron Rolheiser, *The Struggle to Love our Neighbour* (2016)

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