

Introduction to the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy



LESSON OVERVIEW

Learning Goals

- › Works of Mercy are concrete ways in which we can live out our Faith.
- › There are seven Corporal and seven Spiritual Works of Mercy.
- › In Scripture, Christ not only instructs us on what the Works of Mercy are; He also provides examples in His ministry.
- › As Catholics, we are called to be Christ in the world and build His Kingdom through our actions.



Connection to the Catechism

- › CCC 1966-1970
- › CCC 2447



Essential Questions

- › What are the Corporal Works of Mercy?
- › What are the Spiritual Works of Mercy?
- › Why should we perform these works?

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

Lord, you are good and forgiving, most merciful to all who call on you.

PSALMS 65:5

Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.

MATTHEW 7:12

Materials

- ▶ Handout A: The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

Warm-Up

- A. Discuss with students that from what something is, we can tell what we **ought** to do. For example, say “A man is hungry. We **ought** to feed him.” Or “A child is being bullied. We **ought** to stand up for him.”
- B. Call on a student to offer an original “is” statement, and then call on the next student to say the corresponding “ought” statement. Go around the room, alternating between “is” and “ought.” If students struggle to come up with original statements, you could offer:
 - ▶ A man is drowning, and you have a life preserver./You **ought** to throw it to him.
 - ▶ A new student at your school is lonely./You **ought** to welcome him.
 - ▶ A friend is struggling in math, and you are good at math./You **ought** to help him.
 - ▶ A man is dying of thirst./You **ought** to give him water.
 - ▶ An elderly person is walking onto a crowded bus./You **ought** to give her your seat.
 - ▶ A friend is sick in the hospital./You **ought** to visit and cheer up your friend.
- C. When it becomes your turn, make the statement: *You are created in God’s image and likeness.* The class’s response should be something to the effect of, *We **ought** to live like the Lord lives,* or *We should try to be like God.*
- D. Ask students to volunteer some things they know about how Jesus lived. Accept reasoned answers that evidence Jesus’ self-giving love and sacrifice

on the Cross for our salvation. Lead students to the conclusion that in addition to suffering death, Jesus gave us many concrete examples of how to show love to one another. Encourage students to connect this discussion to Jesus' teachings: the greatest commandment, to love one another as He has loved us.

Activity

- A. Have students complete **Handout A: The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy** individually. They should then pair up and discuss their responses.
- B. Call on a few students to share their responses with the class, providing correction as needed.
- C. Ask students if any of the Works of Mercy are mysterious or hard to figure out? Aren't these all what we would want someone to do for us if we needed them to?
- D. Write on the board the golden rule that Jesus gives us in Matthew 7:12 "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets."
- E. Connect Jesus' teaching to the works of mercy, reminding students that the Church believes these works to be essential to the Christian life.

Wrap-Up

- A. Ask students to define the word mercy on a slip of paper and put it into a shoe box or another container that you provide.
- B. Then go around the room and have each student draw a slip from the shoe box or container with the students' definitions of mercy. Ask them to consider whether the definition fits with the one they had in mind. Call on a few students to read their definitions aloud and comment on whether they think the definition is correct and complete.

Write on the board the definition of mercy provided in the glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

MERCY: *The loving kindness, compassion, or forbearance shown to one who offends.*

- C. You might simplify this definition by explaining that mercy is love that keeps on loving even when it is rejected. When we sin, we reject God. But He never stops loving us. His mercy (or His love) is infinite. This kind of love is how we are called to love as Christians.
- D. Explain that the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy are charitable acts we can do for our neighbors. As Catholics, we are called to be Christ in the world and build His Kingdom through our actions. We love God above all, and we love one another as God has loved us.

The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

Directions: Read the works of mercy, looking up any words you don't know. Then write them out on the lines provided. Finally, answer the questions below.

| The Corporal Works of Mercy are | Write the Corporal Works of Mercy |
|---|---|
| Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Clothe the naked. Shelter the homeless. Visit the sick. Visit the imprisoned. Bury the dead. | _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ |
| The Spiritual Works of Mercy are | Write the Spiritual Works of Mercy |
| Instruct the ignorant. Counsel the doubtful. Admonish the sinner. Bear wrongs patiently. Forgive offenses willingly. Comfort the afflicted. Pray for the living and the dead. | _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ |

Focus and Reflection Questions

1. What does *corporal* mean?
2. What does *spiritual* mean?
3. What does *mercy* mean?
4. From where do we get these lists of works of mercy?

Reflection Questions:

5. Why do we need both Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy? Why wouldn't one or the other be enough?
6. Both the Corporal and the Spiritual Works of Mercy are essential to the Christian Life. Which do you think are more important, the Corporal Works of Mercy or the Spiritual Works of Mercy? Explain.

The works of mercy are not optional but are absolutely essential to living the Christian life of holiness and goodness

CCC 2447

Answer Key

Handout A: The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

1. Relating to the body
2. Relating to the soul
3. Mercy is love shown to someone who rejects that love.
4. From the teachings and example of Jesus Christ
5. Accept reasoned answers.
6. Accept reasoned answers, but guide students to the conclusion that because the spiritual works concern the state of a person's soul, they are more important.
Performing spiritual works of mercy for another helps that person get to heaven.