

Audio of Prelate: Visiting and Caring for the Sick

"The first corporal work of mercy the Church recommends to us is centered on visiting and caring for the sick: an effort we see Jesus carrying out frequently during his earthly journey." The Prelate continues his monthly reflections on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

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The first corporal work of mercy the Church recommends to us is centered on visiting and caring for the sick: an effort we see Jesus carrying out frequently during his earthly journey. Among many such scenes from the Gospel, we see Him curing Peter's mother-in-law, raising the daughter of Jairus, attending to the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda and pausing before the blind men waiting for Him at the entrance to Jerusalem. The suffering of these people shows us how God goes out to encounter them, announcing to them the salvation He has come to bring all men and women.

In the sick, our Lord contemplates humanity in its clearest need of salvation. It often happens that, when we enjoy good health, the temptation to forget about God can arise; yet when sorrow or suffering come into our lives, perhaps then we recall the cry of the blind man Jesus

met on leaving Jericho: “Son of David, have pity on me!” In our weakness, we feel ourselves to be especially needy creatures.

Let us too pay attention to the hardships of others, as we see Christ doing. The Holy Spirit, infinite Love, will console other people through our company, our conversation, our respectful and constructive silence when a sick person needs it. We are all busy with many activities each day and our tasks multiply without ceasing, but we shouldn't let a demanding schedule cause us to forget about the sick.

There are many examples of saints who have imitated Jesus in this work of mercy. For example, Saint Josemaria used to say that Opus Dei was born—as a necessity—in the hospitals, and among the sick. After he moved to Madrid in 1926 or 27 and up until 1931, he worked

intensely assisting several charitable institutions (the Foundation for the Sick, the confraternity of Saint Philip Neri, etc.) that cared for sick people in the hospitals and in the peripheries of the capital. Madrid at that time had over a million inhabitants; the suburbs were spread out distance-wise, and good means of transportation were lacking. With a desire to serve the sick in their houses or shacks, he would go wherever needed, always on foot, bringing them the encouragement of Christ and the forgiveness of God the Father. How many people must have gone to Heaven through this priestly work of Saint Josemaria!

In these hospitals and other places, above all from 1933 on, he went accompanied by some of the young people he was helping spiritually. With them, he would offer patients words of affection or various material services, such as washing

them, cutting their nails, combing their hair or giving them something worthwhile to read. Many of these young people, through their encounter with suffering and poverty, discovered Jesus in a profound way in the sick and destitute.

My daughters and sons, and friends who take part in the apostolic activities of the Prelature, this care for the sick shouldn't be reduced to a characteristic of the beginnings alone. Opus Dei continues to be born and to grow each day in you and in me, when we practice mercy with the destitute, when we discover Christ in the souls of those around us, especially those afflicted by some special suffering.

Like Christ, let us bring them God's mercy by our care, our presence, our service—even by a simple telephone call. That way we can distract them a

little from their suffering or loneliness, listen patiently to the worries that weigh on them, and transmit to them affection and strength so that they may react with dignity in the circumstances they face. And we can remind them that illness is an opportunity to unite themselves to Jesus' Cross.

In *The Way*, a book known all over the world, Saint Josemaria wrote: "Children. The Sick. — As you write these words, don't you feel tempted to use capitals? The reason is that in children and in the sick a soul in love sees Him." Already in his youth, Saint Josemaria saw Christ in those who were suffering, because Jesus not only cured the sick but also identified Himself with them. The Son of God suffered tremendously. We can recall, for example, his physical and spiritual exhaustion in the Garden of Olives; the indescribable agony of each lash

during his scourging; the pain and physical weakness that must have overwhelmed Him during the hours of the Passion....

For those who are suffering from a disease, this painful situation could perhaps be viewed as a dark and meaningless burden; life could seem grim and senseless. Therefore, if God allows us to experience suffering, let us accept it. And if we have to go to the doctor, let us docilely obey the instructions we are given and be good patients: with the help of Heaven, let us strive to accept the situation and seek to regain our strength in order to generously serve God and others. But if his will is otherwise, we should say with our Lady, *fiat*, be it done unto me! Thy will be done....

Then we will be able to turn to our Lord in our prayer, saying: *I don't understand what you want, but I don't*

demand that you explain it to me. If You permit this disease, grant me the help to bear it: help me to unite myself more closely to You, and to those who are accompanying me and to all mankind. And echoing some words of Saint Josemaría, let us place our trust in the Holy Spirit: "Spirit of understanding and counsel, Spirit of joy and peace! I want what you want, I want it because you want it, I want it as you want it, I want it when you want it..."

How much good it does to each one's soul to be a bearer of mercy! Let us beseech our Lord, through his Blessed Mother, to sustain us so that we can convey God's affection to those who are sick. And let us welcome God's mercy peacefully, if his Will is that we unite ourselves to Him through the Cross.

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