



Priestly People

WE ALL ARE THE PRIESTLY PEOPLE OF GOD. TOGETHER, WE ARE LEADERS IN RESPONDING TO THE EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS.

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MERCIFUL LIKE THE FATHER



“Jesus shows us the real face of God, for whom power does not mean destruction but love, and for whom justice is not vengeance but mercy.”

– Pope Francis - Year of Mercy

Our collective and individual response to the plight of our world

THE CORPORAL AND SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY – PART I

Raymond J. Gunzel, sP

How will Catholics of all walks of life make the Jubilee Year of Mercy a collective response to the material and spiritual needs of our global community? This is undoubtedly a question going through the minds of laity and clergy as they contemplate the Pope's plea for creating a Church of Mercy, compassion and reconciliation responding concretely to the real needs of millions of our brothers and sisters of all denominations and creeds throughout the world.

The Pope desires for the Church to become a significant and effective agent of cultural change. This can only happen when individuals and groups take to heart their personal call for transformation, to become channels of redeeming grace pouring into the world and touching the hearts and minds of the suffering millions.

Images of Innocent men, women and children suffering from wars, famine, terrorism, religious persecutions, and involuntary immigration flood our televisions, newspapers and political discussions and disputes. Hopelessness, impotence, frustration and anger flood our emotions as we attempt to shut off the ugliness, the evil, the pain or try to find ways to respond effectively to the cry of the poor around us.

Our comfort and security are disturbed by incessant, and almost forgotten, barely conscious call of our religious traditions to feed the poor, clothe the naked, comfort the downtrodden, feed the hungry, welcome the immigrant. We have outsourced the care and feeding of the hungry and needy masses to government organizations and content ourselves with the occasional contribution to the effort.

It remains an inescapable fact however that the deepest call of our spiritual tradition calls for us to step out and courageously confront the issues of our time with bold, creative and innovative action; to reach beyond our personal zones of comfort and sense of wellbeing in the midst of this tsunami of misery that is overwhelming our efforts to deny, rationalize and justify our sense of hopelessness.

Millions of people are suffering, bleeding and dying for lack of the necessities of life and from the violence, fear hatred that has taken hold of our collective consciousness. Children are dying after only a few days, months or years of a life of hunger and disease, feeding flies and mosquitoes with the excreta from their emaciated and bloated bodies. If we are going to be true to our tradition, to act on what we say we believe, there is no escaping the fact that the problems of our world are awaiting our collective and individual action to alleviate and mitigate the ever increasing volume of voices calling for our help.

The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy are formulas for concrete and specific ways in which the Christian, not just the ordained or consecrated persons, but all baptized persons are called to become agents of healing for our wounded human family.

Christianity is more than adherence to belief, dogmas and creeds joined to the practice of ritual and ceremony aimed at placating and pleasing a distant god in the sky. We are called to be transformed, and transforming, enlightened persons, agents of transformation announcing the good news of God's redeeming mercy for all creation and all people not just in words but in specific actions.

We are anointed and empowered to bring about a new creation, a new world order in which every person of all ages and classes are afforded the dignity, the respect, the honor of being children of one divine Father who created us all and endowed us with a share in One Divine Life.

All of us are called to be agents of this New Creation, this restored human family. The answer of course is straightforward: To take to heart and respond whole-heartedly to Christ's call to follow him into the Kingdom that awaits birth in the heart of each one of us. Pope Benedict in his book "Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration", states a quite simple truth.

Human creation intuitively knows God in their heart by virtue of being created in God's image.

Holy Scripture works on the premise that man has knowledge of God's will in his inmost heart, that anchored deep within us there is a participation in God's knowing which we call conscience.

But the scriptures also know that this participation in the Creator's knowledge, which he gave us in the context of our creation "according to his likeness," became buried in the course of history. It can never be completely extinguished, but it has been covered over in many ways, like a barely flicking flame, all too often at risk of being completely smothered under the ash of all the prejudices that have piled up within us.

That is why God has spoken to us anew, uttering words in history that come to us from outside and complete the interior knowledge that has become all too hidden.

Sacred Scripture is a "complementary" revelation of God to awaken us to the intuitive knowledge that is buried beneath the clutter imposed on us by a godless world... we have to listen for the awakening resonance of the word by Sacred Scripture. ("Jesus of Nazareth, Pg. 148-49). Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI).

Scripture is the written word of God awakening us to recognize the forgotten, hidden, denied and neglected truth branded from all eternity into the fiber of our heart. Jesus, Pope Benedict tells us, has come to show us what it means to be a human being. Jesus is the definitive revelation of the forgotten, hidden truth of each one of us. When we follow Jesus to the Cross, we follow him into the death and dissolution of the old false-self-made in

the image and likeness of our darkened world into the self that is the clean, pure image of the divine within – love, and the fruits of love: compassion, forgiveness, justice, and of course the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy.

Jesus calls us to step through the cultural barriers, artificial horizons of our cultural conditioning into the open spaces of our human potential to become our true “God-filled,” “Divinized” personalities. The sacraments and rituals, and celebrations of the church are to become real and effective means for us to become a new creation, a new humanity formed and molded into the perfect image of God in Christ.

Christian spirituality is never merely academic, theoretical or ethereal; much less is it theological or legal. It has substance, it is dynamic and functional and an effective means of releasing our mind and heart from their slavery to the values and perceptions of our fallen world and aligning our heart and mind to the heart and mind of God. Authentically practiced, our religious, spiritual tradition brings about changes that affect the way we see the world, ourselves in the world, and the meaning of our very concrete, substantive relationships with created reality.

Genuine and authentic spiritual energy does not allow for passivity, indifference, detachment, academic speculation or theory; it places us in the context of being active, creative, bold and fearless participants in what the world is becoming. It calls us to accept responsibility for the condition of the world in our time and place. It is the energy that drives towards connectivity, relationships, concrete and creative interactions with the reality of our concrete, living and “becoming” world in process.

Authentic, Christian spirituality places us in the context of being a dynamic and creative part of the ongoing creative enterprise. We are called and empowered drivers and co-creators; co-

evolutionaries guiding and directing what the world is coming to be. This calls us to repentance and conversion from our allegiance to the values and perceptions of a world in darkness to be living lights creating a world of justice, peace and nobility for all. It awakens us to the reality of our failures, our indifference and insensitivity to the pain and suffering of our brothers and sisters who bleed and suffer from cruelty, violence, and want imposed on them by the actions of others, including the action or inaction of ourselves.

We see therefore that Christian Spirituality is not a flight from the pain and messiness of this world, but a dynamic and creative engagement in bringing about the creation of a transformed world. If spiritual work eventually brings peace and serenity, it is not by a denial and avoidance or escape from our material existence, but rather a work of transformation, healing and reconciliation affected by the sweat and muscle of human effort. Jesus is about a new creation, a new earth, a new way of being human, and healing human relationships with the world.

Jesus taught us how to become one with the divine created energies at work in creation. Jesus also taught us by example how to get down and dirty with the messiness and wildness, the pain and sorrow of our broken world. He wore the sweat, bore the tears and blood stains of our struggling world. In the end the pain and sorrow broke his divine heart and poured out blood and water, the final release of the power of his boundless love for all creatures.

*Our collective and individual response to the plight of our world
THE CORPORAL AND SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY – PART 2,
continues in the June 2016 issue of Priestly People.*





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**DEVELOPMENT
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**Marian Wolaver • 636-274-5226 x303 • mwolaver@theservants.org
PO Box 9 • Cedar Hill, MO 63016**