

Spiritual Works of Mercy and the CWL

As we celebrate this **Jubilee Year of Mercy**, I was asked to share some insights into our understanding of the **Spiritual** Works of Mercy, which we know, but are not always familiar with, and our role as leaders in the Catholic Women's League.

Let's begin by looking at **Mercy** itself. Pope Francis states that mercy is a central theme of the bible, and that "Mercy is the expression of God's very self, who is love, and who reaches out with kindness to humanity and the world."

Mercy comes from the latin word "**misericordia**" which literally means 'to have one's heart (cor) near the poor (miseri). Our hearts are to be open and ready to reach out to the poor and needy. We see in the scriptures how God is always merciful and forgiving. The history of salvation reflects this forgiveness and mercy. I think of King David who was a great king and a great sinner. I think of the people of Israel themselves who turned from God so often breaking their covenant, and yet God continually forgave them, showed them mercy and re-welcomed them. I think of the New Testament and the sins of Peter, and the other apostles, and yet Jesus was kind and merciful, forgiving and gentle. He knew of our weaknesses and he understood our passions - and that is where mercy comes in.

The prophet Isaiah said it so completely - "the Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love....he will never accuse, nor will His anger endure forever, He does not treat us according to our sins, but he removes our transgressions from us....as a Father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. (Psalm103)

The Jubilee Year calls us to be **merciful** and **compassionate**. To do so properly and to reflect the mercy of God, we must also reflect the **patience** of God - just as the father was patient in the prodigal son story, or Jesus was patient with the disciples when they did not comprehend. Patience is needed for us to practice mercy and tenderness as God has demonstrated to us through his son, Jesus.

Now where do the Works of Mercy come into play? Pope Francis has asked that during this year, we become more **familiar** with the works of mercy and that we do our best to practice them in our everyday lives. We do so more readily with the Corporal Works of Mercy. (To feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to

visit the sick, to visit the imprisoned, and to bury the dead). We are familiar with these works of mercy and I am sure many of us can cite examples where we have practiced and continue to practice these works, sometimes daily in our lives.

But the **Spiritual** works of mercy are sometimes a bit more of a challenge of for us. Let's look at them and see, if we as members of the Catholic Women's League, can put or are putting these into practice also.

1. **To instruct the unlearned.....or to instruct the ignorant.....**This obviously has to deal with some form of helping in **education**, I would imagine...and we have education commissions, we have schools, we have instructors and teachers, but for us personally, how do we as league members help to instruct. We guide firstly by our **example** of generous service and uncomplaining action. We **model** what we believe, and as Pope Paul VI noted - people learn from the example of others, far sooner than from a formal teaching. Our **example** is our **teaching tool**. How do you as a member of the League - show by your example - instruction to the other members of your team? Is your example one that can be appreciated, and one that **inspires** copying - because it is a **positive** example of joyful giving? We instruct firstly by our example and secondly by the information that we distribute to our members to help them learn. We instruct the unlearned and we prompt them to discern how they can become better league members in support of their council and their church community. Good example is the first key!

2. **To counsel and give hope to the doubtful.....**Practically speaking I think this prompts us to always be **encouraging** to our members and in a positive way, show them that their efforts are **appreciated**, that there is a purpose in their work, and that we do make a **difference** in society even though we might only share in a small part of that action. There are many members who carry burdens with them from family, financial situations, relationship struggles, and worry about issues that affect their lives in a very personal way. We cannot always know what is happening but we can be supportive and encouraging by reassuring them that their work in the league is **important** and that every little gesture of help is appreciated. We all need to be appreciated in our lives, even for the little things we do. (example of a bishop who never showed appreciation to his priests)

Think of how you feel when someone congratulates you and thanks you for your efforts and work. We all need that little '**pat on the back**' and

it is reassuring to know that as members of the league, we do this for each other. Showing appreciation is another key.

3. To admonish the sinner.....well this one is rather tricky. We don't go around pointing out peoples sins....or do we! Maybe that is an important question to ask ourselves. In our talk with one another - do we at times, talk of others and their failings in an **uncomplimentary** way? Pope Francis has often mentioned how 'gossip and loose language....destroys the church.' It destroys our **relationship** with God and with one another.... and we are all guilty of it, at one time or another. For me it is a confessional issue... talking about our priests, our leaders, our companions, our neighbours in a **dis-respectful** way. To admonish someone with kindness and mercy, to help them to better see how they can improve their work or commitment is how we 'admonish the sinner'. And the best way to do this is by example. Always speak in a complimentary way is another key.

4. To bear wrongs patiently.....I already mentioned the importance of **patience** in our lives. We all wished we had more of it! Especially if you are a bit of a obsessive-compulsive person like me! Patience to work with others, who might now always see things **OUR way**.....and who might do things a bit different from us....maybe not even achieving the same results but allowing for this growth and experience. (taught this lesson as a young seminarian at summer camp - by a very wise priest). People might in some way offend us - and we feel hurt, but the response in a Year of Mercy would always be to be patient....not to seek revenge or to mull in anger and upset, which we know accomplishes very little and hinders relationships. Think of the last time you felt you were wronged or hurt, and how did you respond? Having patience and being humble, is another key.

5. To forgive willingly.....this area of forgiveness is always a challenging one for everybody. **Forgiveness** is at the heart of mercy. God continually forgives us for our sins and failings. I think God's love is even more abundant because of our failings. As St. Paul noted: 'Where sin abounds, grace and mercy abound even more". Where does the virtue of forgiveness fit in our lives? As leaders in the league, forgiving others is essential for good leadership. Maybe after we have instructed others patiently, and kindly, we will need to forgive if there exists some resentment or upset in the situation. I think God best demonstrates this for us ... in that God always forgives us - no matter what our sin.... sometimes God forgives more readily than we do. To forgive willingly means to forgive and

let it go..... not bring it up again in the future if a similar situation arises. To forgive and let go is even a greater challenge, yet the Holy Spirit gives us the grace necessary for this action. A great prayer that can help remind us of our need for forgiveness is the prayer of **St. Francis** - Lord make me an instrument of your peace.....We all know this prayer - we sing it often, and maybe it is a prayer that will help remind us of our call as members of the league in our dealings with one another, in our leadership roles, especially with members who are **challenging** to deal with. Forgive and let go is the key.

6. To comfort the afflicted..... We do not need to go far to find people who are afflicted in our world today. We see it in the **news** each day, we read about it in the papers, we hear it on the radio, and we know that the world is full of people who are afflicted with some form of suffering or struggle in one way or another. We sometimes do not have to look very far to find people in need of comfort and support, even in our own **families**. We reach out globally, as we do with **refugees**, and those in struggling countries, and the league does much for this. But to recognize the afflicted in our own midst - and to reach out in comfort and support to them is our challenge also. I spoke earlier of people who carry **baggage** that is many times unknown to us... but we know there is a struggle. How as a member of the Catholic women's League can I be a support to others? Maybe it can only be by my **silent** presence with them. Maybe it can be in a kind **gesture** of concern, a phone call, a card, a note of remembering. Maybe it can be in our expression of **prayer** for them - as we do so often when someone is ill or in distress, for them and their family members. We do this because we practice a Spiritual Work of Mercy.....as a follower of Jesus. Jesus comforted the afflicted as we saw in the Gospels. The woman whose son had died, Martha and Mary at the death of their brother, the sick and those who felt abandoned, (I have no one to help me into the water for healing). We are challenged to follow this work of mercy most readily in our lives as league members. There are many people who need comfort and prayers...we cannot always **solve** a problem or find a solution, but just our expression of concern is a form of comfort. Let's remember this. A gesture of concern, no matter how little is always a support, and this is a key.

7. To pray for the living and the dead..... As members of the Catholic Women's League we know that **prayer** is a powerful tool in our armoury. A powerful tool that we use readily for all occasions, but in

particular when there is a special need or concern. We pray for the sick, the struggling, the homeless, the neglected, but we also pray for each other..... who might not have a particular need - but we know that prayer supports us all. Each time we celebrate a **Mass** together we are strengthened, not just by the Eucharist we share, but by the prayers we pray. We pray both for the living and the dead. I know because I get all the requests for Masses for those who are sick and those who have died. It shows our **connection** to one other through prayer and our relationship with the Father through Jesus. If you listen carefully in the Mass, you will realize that we pray for the Pope, the Bishop, the sick, the dead and for ourselves. **Everyone** is included in that prayer. It is a prayer that encompasses the entire church community both living and deceased. Our prayers are powerful and God does answer our prayers - not always in the way we expect - but always in a way that is **best** for us. We pray for the living and the dead. Prayer in our **daily** life is a key.

Looking at the Spiritual Works of Mercy in this little reflection, I hope I have given everyone some insight as to how we can live this Jubilee Year in a more **conscientious** way. We remind ourselves that as followers of Jesus, we can imitate **Mary** - who demonstrated many of these works of mercy in her own life. She did it with humility and gentleness, with patience and many times in humble **silence**. As we embark on this year of grace and work as a league, may these works of mercy guide us and support us in all our endeavours. God bless you all!

What are the keys?

1. Good positive example
2. Show appreciation
3. Be complimentary
4. Have patience be humble
5. Forgive and let go
6. Every gesture, even small, is a support
7. Pray daily

Let us end with the small prayer at the end of the little card I gave you on the works of mercy.

God our heavenly Father, help me to perform these works of mercy in my daily life, and to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all whom I meet through my action of mercy and love. Through Christ our Lord. AMEN