

Meditation on the Corporal Works of Mercy

catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/2008/01/let-the-weeds-and-the-wheat-grow-together/

January 8, 2008

I'm always suspicious of people who tell me that when they were in Vegas, they won X amount of money playing a certain game or machine. They never tell you how much they lost along the way!

In the same way, I'm about to tell you about a moment I had last night at religious education that was like hitting the jackpot. I'll follow that, however, with a little disclaimer that shows it wasn't all roses.



Anyway, last night I led a guided meditation on the Corporal Works of Mercy. In this meditation, Jesus enters the room and sits down next to the young person and they engage in conversation about what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus then slowly lays out the works of mercy that his disciples are called to do. In all, the meditation lasted about 15 minutes and I did it for 4 separate groups of 8th graders.

The "jackpot" moment was after one of the meditations, when I was explaining to the group that they had just meditated and that their key is to use their imaginations to engage in conversation with Jesus. A young man then said, "Yeah, it's like he was sitting right next to me."

WOW! Isn't that what we catechists live for? I was thrilled to hear him say this, especially in front of his peers. I told the group that this is something they can practice at home: go to their room, get in a comfortable position, pay attention to their breathing until they slow it down, and then imagine Jesus entering the room to sit and talk with them.

Now, before you think that I had them eating out of my hand all night, here's what else I dealt with:

- a cell phone going off in the middle of one meditation
- 3 young people who just couldn't stop chatting with one another
- one young person who felt compelled to just blurt out a comment every few minutes during the meditation despite my directions for quiet
- a mysterious laser pointer whose source I was never able to determine
- 2 young people with the giggles during a meditation
- 1 young person who fell asleep during the meditation

Out of the 4 meditations, I would say 2 went extremely well, 1 was OK, and 1 was a struggle. The bottom line is that we have to let the weeds and the wheat grow together (Matthew 13:24-30). We need patience and endurance to put up with the frustrating part of our ministry, knowing that God's grace can, does, and will penetrate and make an impact on some who are ready.

Here's the text of the meditation. Feel free to use it.

Meditation on the Corporal Works of Mercy

Today, we're learning about what it is that Catholics believe and do. During the next 20 minutes, we're going to focus on some very specific things that Catholics do. They're called works of mercy because, when we perform these works, we share God's merciful love with others.

Let's take a moment to get comfortable now.

Make sure you're in a position where you can be comfortable and still for the next 20 minutes.

Let's quiet ourselves. Slowly and quietly breathe in to the count of 5. (1,2,3,4,5)

Hold your breath for 1 second.

Now slowly and quietly breathe out to the count of 5 (1,2,3,4,5)

Let's do that again. (repeat)

Now, imagine that everyone else in this room just vanished and that you are all alone, enjoying the quiet.

Before long, Jesus walks in and sits next to you.

He asks how you are doing. Talk to him.

He explains that he is here today to ask you to be one of his followers.

You ask him, "Jesus, what do I have to do to be one of your followers?"

Jesus says, "the most important thing to do is to care for the needs of others. I want you to show mercy to others by tending to their needs whenever you can."

You ask Jesus, "what do you mean? What kind of needs?"

Jesus says, "let me tell you about the needs that people have and how you can help them:

I want you to recognize when people are hungry and thirsty. Start in your own home. People don't have to be starving to be hungry. Think about how you can help at meal time in your family. Help set the table. Help to prepare the food in the kitchen. Help to clean up afterwards.

But also, keep in mind all the people in the world who don't have food and water like you do. Pay attention to how you can help with food drives, support food pantries, work at a soup kitchen, or give money to people who feed the hungry.

I want you to shelter the homeless. You are very lucky to have a good roof over your head. Take care of your home. Help your neighbors to care for their homes. Pay attention to some of the ways that you can support people who work with the homeless. Homeless shelters need donations of soap, shampoo, and other personal items...maybe you can help by donating some of these.

I want you to clothe those who have no clothing. Again, you are very lucky to have warm clothes and shoes on your feet. Thank your parents for providing you with clothing and try not to get hung up on spending a lot of money on clothes. Go through your drawers and your closet and pack up some clothing that you can give to someone less fortunate.

I want you to visit the sick and imprisoned. I know that you're not old enough to visit people in jail and hospitals even have age limits. But there are other ways you can be present to people. You can call or send a card to someone who is sick. If you have relatives that can't get out of the house often because of their age or sickness, spend some time with them. People don't have to be in jail to be imprisoned. Some people are imprisoned in their own homes because of sickness. Of course, if any of your friends are sick, be sure to visit them or call them...it will mean a lot to them.

I want you to be of help to others who are suffering the death of a loved one. I know it's not fun to go to a wake or a funeral, but it means so much to the people who are grieving to just know that you care and that they are not alone. If you have grandparents or other relatives who are widows or widowers, spend some time with them. They can be very lonely missing their loved ones who have died. You probably even have friends who have lost a loved one. Be sure to show that you care and that you are there for them.

Finally, I want you to do what you can to help the poor. I know you probably don't have a lot of money of your own but you'd be surprised to know just how many people in the world have far less than you have. Do what you can to share with those in need. Save your change in a jar at home and every once in a while, donate it to those who work with the poor. Instead of buying something for yourself, every once in a while, buy something for the poor or give the money to help those who are poor.

Jesus pauses and then says, I'm not asking you to change the world. But if you and all of my followers do what you can, the world will change. I want you to do works of mercy: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, bury the dead, and give to the poor. Will you consider being my follower?

Tell Jesus that you are preparing for Confirmation...preparing to follow him in a new way as a young adult. Tell him that you want to follow him but that you need his help. Talk to Jesus about what's keeping you from truly being one of his followers.

Jesus knows that it's time for you to move on now. He asks if there's anything else you want to say to him or ask him. Take time to do that now.

Thank Jesus for this time together.

Watch as he walks out of the chapel and down the stairs.

Spend a quiet moment now with the Holy Spirit.

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous ¹⁶ will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'