

The Corporal Works of Mercy: Feed the Hungry & Give Drink to the Thirsty

“Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

What is a Corporal Work of Mercy?

Grow: Have you ever seen someone hungry? Perhaps a baby crying out for food? How does that make you feel? If you feel concern for the baby and an urgency to help, you are experiencing compassion. Compassion means “to suffer with.”

Every human person has bodily needs that must be met by another. For example, a baby cannot feed herself. Can you think of another example? When you feel compassion, you (mercifully) experience another’s suffering in a personal way. This feeling of compassion moves us to action—we ask, how can I help? This is a work of mercy!

God created us this way. We understand how a hungry person may feel because we have felt hunger, too. In His command to love our neighbor as ourselves, He entrusts our care to one another. Understanding similar suffering (hunger and thirst) helps us to truly see our neighbor as ourselves. It is an exercise of the heart!

The Corporal Works of Mercy are ways in which we put the compassion we feel for another’s bodily suffering into action. When we feed the hungry and give water to those who thirst we are performing two of the corporal works of mercy.

A God-Given Duty!

Pray: In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches us that when we give food and drink to those who hunger and thirst, we are also giving food and drink to Jesus Himself! In this same passage, He gives us a grave (serious) reminder: If we choose not to care for those who hunger and thirst, we choose not to care for Jesus. If we deny Jesus in this way, we will experience eternal punishment.

What does this mean? Jesus makes it very clear that living the Christian life means we must serve our neighbor well, especially the “least of these” (those who are vulnerable and unable to help themselves). With this command, He emphasizes how sacred human life is—our care and protection of one another’s most basic needs is a duty of the Christian life. As long as there are hungry people we must do something! Ask the Lord to help you have compassion throughout your day for those who are suffering and to use your hands, feet, and heart to serve those who are in need.

Hunger for Happiness

Serve: After Jesus’s Resurrection, He appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and asked them what they spoke about. The disciples did not recognize Jesus, so they began to tell them the story of the crucified and risen Christ. Only when Jesus stopped and requested something to eat that “Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

How incredible that Jesus makes Himself known to you and me in the “breaking of the bread,” too! God meets us amid our need for food with the gift of the Eucharist. He responds to our need for nourishment by giving us food that not only feeds our body but also our soul!

When we feed someone who is hungry we are loving with the heart of God and using our hands as His hands. When we do this, we share Christ in a beautiful way. But this is only the beginning! Just as we are called to give food to those who are hungry we are called to invite all we meet to the meal of the Mass where our hunger for happiness is fulfilled!

