

MANNA *in the wilderness*

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Accepting the Year of Mercy with Gratitude

"Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope." - Pope Francis

by Julia Occhiogrosso

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night to a sorrow that feels perhaps personal, perhaps global. I feel a heaviness in my center, the place just below my heart. It's not a particular sorrow, pertaining to a specific sad story. No, it feels more like a tapestry of all the sorrows that have ever registered consciously or unconsciously in the shadows of my soul. I lay awake just

noticing. With every breath rises the images, the stories, the memories. The boats full of abandoned refugees. The toddler dead on the ocean current. The rows of homeless humans sprawled out on the pavement as I drive past. The miseries of war and violence. The victims of natural and human-made disasters. The insidious suffering of the unloved, the unwanted, the tortured, the abused, the sick, the imprisoned. The thought of my mentally ill son locked behind prison bars.

In the dark of night when the protective structures of my ego-self are weakened, and the defense mechanisms of control are loose and vulnerable, the images feel infinite. It is in these terribly graced moments my heart can allow the more painful realities of life to enter. Those painful realities more often than not, in the wake of day, I am inclined to resist and avoid.

In the wake of day I am occupied, engaged. I find joy in the community, the work, the garden.

Yet, these sorrows do not disappear but are integrated into a practice that attempts in small gestures to alleviate some of the suffering.

The practice of the Works of Mercy is the trademark of the Catholic Worker movement. Most Catholic Worker communities are engaged with one or more of these practices. Their mission gives expression to the age-old church teachings to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, comfort the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. To embody if you will, the mercy so beautifully modeled by Jesus, who, with his last breaths offered to the world, "forgive them, they know not what they do." When we truly receive this divine mercy, we are strengthened to give in the same way to others.

The practice of the Works of Mercy serves a spiritual function for the practitioner as well as the recipient. While offering tenderness to the one afflicted by the suffering, it also performs the task of protecting the compassionate heart from being entirely destroyed and paralyzed by the suffering. It is the vehicle for right action that allows the love of God to move in the world. A presence that can

transform and heal the shattered remnants of hope that often plague our lives.

Pope Francis's declaration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy is an invitation and opportunity to take a new look at this lost and forgotten practice. Conditioned by a culture of fear and self-preservation, this practice is rationalized into oblivion. Our fears have us demonizing and scapegoating the very human beings that beckon for our mercy.

We close our doors to refugees. We refuse to share our wealth in programs that would provide housing for the homeless. Our remedy for the mentally-ill is imprisonment. Our acceptance of perpetual war, by unquestioned obscene appropriations for weapons is a merciless approach to political conflicts.

To practice mercy stretches us beyond our fears and need for self-preservation. It challenges us to give up our need to control the outcome of our gestures. It calls us to a stance that suspends judgement. Do they deserve my mercy or not? And even if we are not clear enough to act with mercy, we can perhaps avail our hearts to heed its promptings.

When we look upon even the most disturbing acts with the lens of mercy, we will be lead to an understanding that exposes the suffering of the perpetrator. Ironically, socially abhorrent behavior absent of remorse has been correlated to early childhood abuse and neglect. There are similar correlations regarding chronic drug addictions. The typical judgment of these acts leads to a thirst for vengeance and retribution. Instead, if we could offer even a mustard seed of mercy, we could begin to move toward divine justice.

It can move us to a higher realm of spirituality that surrenders to, and trusts in the power of the Source of Eternal Life.

Rather than seeing this call to mercy as just another obligation of Catholic social teaching; I wish to accept this Papal invitation with gratitude. It reminds me to take the path close to suffering, to look deeply at and embrace the ragged tapestry of sorrows life weaves, yet not to be overcome by it. To take the seeds of sorrow that haunt us in the dark moments and allow them to bear fruit in the world.



CHRIST AND THE LEPER
BY FRITZ EICHENBERG

Recommitment to Bishop's Catholic Campaign to End Death Penalty

Ten years ago, the Catholic bishops of the United States initiated the *Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty*. Speaking as pastors and teachers, we issued a statement at that time, *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, in which we considered the reality of capital punishment in the United States. We urged a prudential examination of the use of the death penalty, with the aim of helping to build "a culture of life in which our nation will no longer try to teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill. This cycle of violence diminishes all of us."

Since that time, significant gains have been made. Several states, including New York, New Jersey, New Mexico, Illinois, Connecticut, Maryland and most recently Nebraska, have ended the use of the death penalty, and other states have enacted moratoria. Death sentences are at their lowest level since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976. However, there is still a great deal of work to be done, and we must recommit ourselves to end this practice in our country.

We join our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in anticipation of the forthcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy, and renew our efforts in calling for the end of the use of the death penalty:

"Today the death penalty is inadmissible, no matter how serious the crime committed. It is an offense against the inviolability of life and the dignity of the human person, one which contradicts God's plan for man and society and his merciful justice, and impedes the penalty from fulfilling any just objective. It does not render justice to the victims, but rather fosters vengeance."
- Pope Francis, March 20, 2015

Our faith tradition offers a unique perspective on crime and punishment, one grounded in mercy and healing, not punishment for its own sake. No matter how heinous the crime, if society can protect itself without ending a human life, it should do so. Today, we have this capability.

We are all sinners, but through the Father's loving mercy and Jesus' redeeming sacrifice upon the Cross, we have been offered the gift of life everlasting. The Lord never ceases his loving pursuit of us in our sin and brokenness, offering us the choice of life over death. The use of the death penalty cuts short any prospect for transforming the condemned person's soul in this life. Catholic opposition to the death penalty, then, is rooted in mercy. It is also eminently pro-life, as it affords every opportunity for conversion, even of the hardened sinner. As followers of Jesus, we have the "inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life" (Evangelium Vitae, # 20).

Our Catholic faith affirms our solidarity

with and support for victims of crime and their families. We commit ourselves to walk with them and assure them of the Church's compassion and care, ministering to their spiritual, physical and emotional needs in the midst of deep pain and loss. We also acknowledge the inherent human dignity of those who have committed grave harm, affirming that, even as they repay a debt to society, they too should receive compassion and mercy. As we seek to tend to the eternal needs of those who commit serious crimes we must build up a culture of life in matters of justice and punishment.

The Church's opposition to the death penalty should not be seen as indifference to the sinfulness of crime and attacks on human life, but as an affirmation of the sacredness of all life even for those who have committed the most heinous of crimes. As Archbishop Joseph Naumann of the Archdiocese of Kansas City, whose own father was murdered, recently said: "Our refusal to resort to the death penalty is not because we fail to appreciate the horror of the crime committed, but because we refuse to imitate violent criminals."

Through our recommitment to work to end the use of the death penalty, we also renew the call for all people of good will to:

1. **Pray** for victims of crime, those facing execution, and those working in the criminal justice system;
2. **Reach out** to the families of those affected by violent crime by bringing Christ's love and compassion;
3. **Learn** about the Church's teaching on capital punishment and **educate** others in this vital area of concern;
4. **Advocate** for better public policies to protect society and end the use of the death penalty.

SOUP LINE CLOSED: August 10 - 20, 2016

**WE NEED VOLUNTEERS
May 5 & June 2 for Christ the
King Hot Dog Party at Soup Line**

PLEASE JOIN US:

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.:

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:

Breakfast served to 150-200 poor & homeless people.

Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.:

Hospitality Day, we invite 20 homeless men home for showers, to wash clothes and for a great lunch.

Thursday, 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.:

Vigil for Peace in front of Federal Courthouse, 333 Las Vegas Blvd. S.

Thursday, 10:30 a.m.:

50 lunches taken to the homeless.

Third Saturday of the month:

Deliver food boxes to homes in need.

The Scriptures remind us: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Lk 5:7). As Christians, we are called to oppose the culture of death by witnessing to something greater and more perfect: a gospel of life, hope, and mercy. To help build a culture of life, capital punishment should be abolished.

-Archbishop Sean Cardinal O'Malley is Chairman on the Committee on Pro-Life Activities and Archbishop Thomas Wenski is Chairman on the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

Mercy...

by Robert Majors

Mercy...

like wind makes light the heavy heart
it blows between all things apart
transitioning from end to start
like leaves that fall, to light the dark

those who fly do love its gust
they are as light as loving doves
and in the flight of humble trust
the feathers fall from fearless thrust

the name that tames all love and war
that ties the truth to worried words
and binds the sides of shame and hurt
to change the tide of waving swords

a love like this will feed who starve
and soak the lips the desert carves
that soothe the wounds of timeless scars
and knows to start with open arms

that knows the worth of every life
and shines to all who's wrong or right
that cover's shame with graceful sight
and gives a grave the same delight

and still this love will always climb
the more you give, the more you find
with every gift, it will remind
of all you have received in time

so sink inside the warmth of peace
and know the world as a leaf
that grows to feed and lives to teach
then dies to let light through the tree

and in this place inside your chest
when growing thoughts are put to rest
where all you see is left unsaid
and all you need to do is live

this is where your heart will hear
the least of you, so pure and clear
and all you see you will hold dear
then grow, and feed, and teach from here