

## March In the Year of Mercy

Your Family's  
Door of Mercy



# Teaching the Way of Love

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### PLEASE PRAY THAT

- Families will learn to live the Works of Mercy with each other, and then share their love with the world.
- Parents will come to see their task of parenting as an exercise in sacrificial love and a way to Heaven.
- All families will form community of persons that serve life, develop society and share in the life and mission of the Church.
- All families will work to become true communities where nobody is a stranger.
- Children will see in their parents a constant example of forgiveness and love.
- Children will feel the love and mercy of God because of their parent's love.
- Families will reach out to each other in love and support, especially in times of difficulty.

## The Corporal Works of Mercy in the Family

The Church has always taught the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy to be acts of love that every disciple of Jesus should be doing. The Corporal Works of Mercy come directly from Jesus' teaching about the "sheep" and the "goats" who are separated out from each other in the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). The righteous (represented by the sheep) are those who see the needs of people around them and reach out in Jesus' name. The goats were those who see the needs around them and choose not to reach out in love.

In his encyclical "*Caritas en Veritate*" (Love in Truth), Pope Benedict XVI made an important observation and gave an equally important warning. He said that modern Catholic culture has put too much emphasis on the works of mercy being exercised on a societal level through institutions and Church structures. While institutions and Church structures have their place, Pope Benedict warned that Catholics were in danger of losing Jesus' real message. What gets us to Heaven is love.

Pope Benedict's warning resonates strongly with the teachings of Saint Therese of Lisieux, who taught in her "Little Way" that not everyone can do great things, but everyone can do little things with great love.

What does that mean, to do little things with great love? It means that you forget yourself and your needs in order to meet the needs of those around you. It is the willingness to drop your personal sensitivities so that you can respond to others in joy.

Practically, opportunities to do the little things with great love happen each day within our home: making a bed without being asked, wiping a bathroom sink for the next person, taking out the trash without a complaint, not texting or checking your Facebook account during dinner with the family. These seemingly trite actions are shining examples of the "Little Way."

So our "mercy challenge" for you this month is to look for ways that you are exercising the Corporal Works of Mercy within the "small" realm of your own family. The true challenge here is how you can exercise these works of mercy within your home in a way that expresses more deeply the love of Jesus to your family.



By Teniers, David the younger (1610 - 1690) (Studio of, Details of artist on Google Art Project) [Public domain], via

***Because humanity passes by way of the family...***

**Feed the Hungry & Give drink to the thirsty**—Some people love to cook. For others it's a drudgery. But either way, how can you make the family meal an exercise of love? This not only goes for the food you prepare, but also for the community you create as you sit down to meals together.

**Welcome the Stranger**—In his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* ("the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World"), Pope John Paul II challenged families to become a "community of persons" where no family member is a stranger. But we have to admit that sometimes our families become a bunch of strangers sharing room and board. How can you create a truly welcoming, intimate atmosphere to encourages family members to enter into the family community?

**Clothe the Naked**—A big part of parenting is providing for the physical needs of our children. But clothing is so much more than just a source of protection and warmth. It's also an expression of who we are. How can your shopping choices help your children reveal that they are beloved children of God, created in His image and destined to be princes and princesses of the Kingdom of God? Keep in mind as well that sometimes clothing made with loving hands carries more meaning and love than something purchased from the store.

**Visit the Imprisoned**—To visit someone in prison is an act of mercy because it signifies forgiveness. There is still an acknowledgement that the person has done wrong and is serving a just sentence, but the person's worth and dignity despite their choices and actions is also acknowledged in the visit. There are many ways our family members can be stuck in their own prisons. How can we reveal our love to them, and God's love to them, despite their imprisonment? How can we express forgiveness?

**Care for the sick**—Nobody likes to be sick. But sometimes being sick is a good reminder that we need to step out of the "rat race," to rest, and to take better care of ourselves. Being sick can be an experience of letting go of things that we think are urgent or important, but that really aren't. Caring for sick family members is also a great opportunity for us to show them what is truly important by showing them how much they are loved. How can you tend to the heart as well as the body by caring for the sick in your family?

## Here is your March Challenge

The Corporal Works of Mercy are really expressions of the kind of love we are to have for all people. But the family is our first sphere of love. Ask each family member to pick one or two "Little Ways" to forget themselves in order to make life better for the rest of the family. Help them make their choice by reviewing the Corporeal works of mercy or by reading a story about Therese of Lisieux.

At the end of the week, sit down as a family asking everyone to talk about how family life was affected by everyone's efforts. Thank each family member for doing the little things with great love.

This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit [www.twl4parents.com](http://www.twl4parents.com) for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) home study series for parents. Find out more at [www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love](http://www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love).