

**April
In the Year
of Mercy**

**Tending to the
Spiritual
Nature**



Teaching the Way of Love

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PLEASE PRAY THAT

- Families will reach out to each other in love and support, especially in times of difficulty.
- Families will live the Spiritual Works of Mercy more perfectly, 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 gain the kingdom of 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 parents' love.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy in the Family

Every parent wants to say with confidence, "I have provided well for my children." We want to be assured that our children have a bright future, filled with comfort and goodness. To that end, we work our tails off to supply not only what they need, but also what they may want. Our efforts are largely founded on the desire to keep our children out of poverty and away from harm.

There is nothing erroneous about providing a better life for our children. In fact, during this Year of Mercy, many parents are doing all they can to provide a better life for their children through the daily exercise of the Corporal Works of Mercy. By feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked and the rest, parents care of their children's physical needs. Of course this is necessary. Of course, this is God's work. Of course, this is honorable and noble.

There is something incorrect, however, about focusing *only* on the Corporal Works of Mercy. A child is much more than just a body; he is a person who also has a spiritual side that needs attention. The Catholic Church teaches us that; "*the unity of the soul and the body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body; it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature*" (CCC 365).

If you want to confidently say that you have provided well for your children, in addition to the Corporal Works of Mercy you must attend to the Spiritual Works of Mercy; admonish the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the afflicted, bear wrongs patiently, forgive offenses willingly and pray for the living and the dead.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are based on numerous Scripture passages that remind us how joy in life springs from living like Christ; gently set each other right when sin is detected (Gal 6:1), instructing and admonishing one another (Col 3:16), correcting those who are confused (Jude 23), comforting each other (Isaiah 66:13), helping carry each other's burdens (Gal 6:2) forgiving each other (Col 3:12) and praying constantly and attentively (Eph 6:18).



Because humanity passes by way of the family...

One might look at the Spiritual Works of Mercy and sound the toll of defeatism immediately because this list of seven is intimidating. You are correct, calling a family member out when they do something wrong will require tough love. Tightening the restrictions on the media habits of your kids will cause some tantrums. Listening to and comforting your kids when they are frustrated or confused will eat into your Facebook time. Convincing yourself to sit quietly and wait for a child to complete a task according to your specifications will make you see red. Forgiving an offense that has become a pattern of wrong-doing will bring you to the brink of despair. And praying for the living and the dead – who has time for that after tackling the first six Works of Mercy?

Do not give in or give up so fast! The Spiritual Works of Mercy should be looked at as more of a journey than a list of tasks. They are a pilgrimage through life rather than a destination. They are a new way of living that resembles a Christ-like life. This is a polite way of saying that integrating the Spiritual Works of Mercy into your life will take time. But it is time well spent.

It helps to think of it in the way that St. Theresa of Avila did when she wrote this simple reflection.

Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people.

Ease into the Spiritual Works of Mercy one at a time. Take them one at a time and make each of them a habit in your daily life. Remember, parenting is a journey rather than a destination.

Here is your April Challenge

During the Season of Easter, contemplate each of the spiritual works of mercy by reflecting on the following questions.

1. What sins do I see around me on a daily basis that I have become numb to? What would change if I chose to object to the sins I see?
2. Do my children know what is right and wrong according to God's will? Or, do my children decide what is right and wrong based on their own thinking? How can I help them know more about God's will?
3. How well do I listen to what my children are telling me? Do I know what really bothers or confuses them? How often do I offer my kids' problems to the Lord and ask for His advice before responding to their doubts?
4. What brings fear into my children's hearts? Do I blow their concerns off or do I attend to their worries by offering my support and reassurance? Do I pray with and for my children?
5. Do I have enough unscheduled time in my schedule to allow for patience? Do I plan for the unexpected errors that my kids will commit? How can I loosen up my routine to be more present to my family?
6. Are my standards set high enough to call my kids to do what is right or have I let my standards slip down enough that my kids can find "wobble room" to do what is wrong? When an offense is committed, what do I have to do to remain calm? Can I forgive an offense completely and move forward or do I harbor revenge?
7. Do I pray routinely each day? What prayers do I offer for my family each day? What prayers do I offer in gratitude each day? When was the last time I prayed for the souls of departed family members and friends? Do I ask my family to pray for me?

This challenge is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit 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.