

## Virtue of Mercy Reflection to students – Michael Kelleher – Interim Principal

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Mercy is kind of a tough word to define... and it can be confused quite often for the virtue of forgiveness. Forgiveness being: Pardoning those who offend you. But Mercy, as defined in the Virtues in Practice program is simply, “caring for those who suffer.” So, how do we care for those who suffer?

I once heard it said... “every single person on earth has a cross to bear. And every person’s cross is different.” Again, “every single person has a cross to bear. And every person’s cross is different.” If you have a cross to bear, and you have a cross, and you and you and you and everyone in the world... then we can also look for ways to help each one of us carry someone else’s Cross.

Let’s look at Simon the Cyrene who literally stepped in to help Jesus. In the case of Jesus, it was blatantly obvious what Jesus’ cross was... His cross was...well, it was... a cross. Of course, that’s where we get the entire concept of carrying a cross. But, I think the Virtue of Mercy helps us to remember to be on the look out so that we can 1) remember that everyone has a cross to bear and 2) when possible, just like Simon the Cyrene, step in to help carry the cross.

Some people have very identifiable crosses. For example, the person who loses their home in a house fire, or the person who is struggling with a serious illness, or the person who has recently lost a loved one, those are very real and heavy crosses that need our immediate assistance. We should do everything in our power to help in those times of tragedy or great need.

But, having mercy on someone can be harder to detect some times. For example, sometimes people may be having a difficult time in a relationship with a friend or family member, or they might not be grateful for the way they look or feel.

In my own life, there have been times when I’ve needed some help with a cross I’ve had to bear. In those cases, my dad has always been there for me. In fact, a few years ago when I had a really rough year, my dad knew I was struggling not only to support my family, but also emotionally, and he stepped up to help me lift my cross by helping me get a new job at the family business. One of the ways that my dad helps me carry my crosses is by going with me on really long bike trips. Every year, we bike really long distances for several days together. For example, last year, we rode from Washington, DC to Pittsburgh, PA. This year, over Easter Break we will ride from Greenville, SC to Charleston, SC. It’s a time to get away and talk and really help each other with each other’s crosses.

The church gives us a roadmap to help us help ease another person’s suffering... It’s called the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. The Corporal Works of Mercy are actually pretty easy to identify and they can be alleviated through getting needed resources, whether food or water, or a specific service to the person/people in need. They Corporal Works of Mercy are:

Feed the hungry; Give drink to the thirsty; Shelter the homeless; Clothe the naked; Visit the sick; visit the imprisoned; Bury the dead

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are a little tougher to help with. They are:

Instruct the ignorant; admonish the sinner, counsel the doubtful; bear wrongs patiently; forgive offenses willingly; comfort the afflicted; pray for the living and the dead.

I once heard it said that there is one prayer that, if we pray it, will always be answered. The one prayer that will always be answered is, "Lord, send someone for me to help." Again, "Lord, send someone for me to help." But, guess what, guess who really needs your mercy? or your help most of the time?... Your mom and dad. Have you thought about having mercy on your mom or dad. You could have mercy on your mom by offering to wash the dishes or do your chores without complaining. Or you could have mercy on your dad by offering to help cut the grass or help around the house. Or your teachers, have you thought about having mercy on your teachers? Meaning, you could help clean up around the classroom without being asked.

Like I mentioned with the Spiritual and Corporal works of Mercy, the Catholic church teaches us 14 different ways to show mercy.... And each person we come across is going to have a different need, but every one we come across could certainly use our help. So, perhaps think of having mercy on someone as being helpful in specific circumstances. And guess what, in return, your teachers perform a spiritual work of mercy on you every minute of every day... That spiritual work of mercy is.... "Instruct the ignorant" .... which, granted, might be a looser interpretation of what it means to instruct the ignorant, but therefore, by default, your teachers are helping you carry your cross.

So, what do we look for this month in our class mates? Look for the person who is constantly looking for ways to help lift other people's crosses. But more specifically, the person to nominate is good at knowing how to help carry the other person's cross. Meaning, if they see someone who is upset or crying that that person will stay with them until they feel better or will try to look for ways to help them carry the cross either by spending time with them, or sharing their favorite snack, or inviting them to go watch their favorite sports team on the weekend, or helping them to learn how to pray or look for God in the midst of a really heavy cross. Look for the person who is able to connect with a person out of love. And, as always, say a prayer of gratitude for that person as you are nominating him/her. Thank you.