

**RESPONDING TO DIVINE MERCY:
THE CORPORAL AND SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY**
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What is Divine Mercy?

The message of Divine mercy you have been hearing from my sisters is that we are miserable, weak creatures, and the Lord loves us anyways- because He is merciful. We see his mercy everywhere throughout all the scriptures, through the messages of St. Faustina, Through John Paul II encyclical, "Rich in Mercy," through the Catechism, through the sacraments, -most especially the mass and confession and by contemplating the pierced Heart of Christ himself. As if these were not enough and to help us to come to Him more, Our Lord opens up five fountains, five vessels as if coming from His five wounds for us to draw from there His mercy. Through these vessels we can "keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy (Diary 327) These fountains are (1)The Image of Mercy,(2)The Chaplet of mercy- (3)The Feast of Mercy, (4)The Novena to the Divine Mercy and (5) The Three O'clock Hour. And how do we open ourselves up to receive this ocean of mercy. How do we draw the water of His mercy from these fountains? He tells St. Faustina through trust. The graces of My Mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only that is "trust. ...The greatest flames of My mercy are burning me I desire to pour them out upon human souls. Oh what pain they cause me when they don't want to accept them! My daughter do whatever is within your power to spread devotion to My Mercy. I will make up for whatever you lack. Tell aching humanity to snuggle close to My merciful Heart and I will fill it with peace. (Diary1074).



We've briefly outlined what Divine mercy is, where to receive it, the vessel of trust that is needed to receive it, but I want to focus this talk on what is rarely spoken of at conference on mercy- and that is how to respond to so much mercy received. What should be our response to so much mercy? The simple answer is Mercy, by being mercy to others. We must give away the Mercy we have received.

Divine Mercy is the Trinity pouring out Love to each other and to us in Creation and Redemption. We in turn receive this redemption and our hearts are converted and we are filled with Trust and love for God. In response to this love received, we (1) pour out Love and gratitude to the Trinity. And (2) we respond with works of mercy to our neighbor. This response to God and to our neighbor further converts us making us into the image and likeness of our Merciful Lord.

Where do we see this call of our Lord's call to be merciful to others in: scripture, the messages of St. Faustina, in blessed John Paul II's encyclical and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Scripture: Be merciful as your heavenly father is merciful,(Lk6:36). "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt. 5:7). And in those who the Lord says will enter paradise Mt 25: 31

Jesus told St. Faustina (and us):

"My daughter, look into My Merciful Heart and reflect its Compassion in your own heart and in your deeds, so that you, who proclaim my mercy to the world, may yourself be aflame with it" (Diary, 1688).

"My daughter, if I demand through you that people revere My mercy, you should be the first to distinguish yourself by this confidence in My mercy. I demand from you deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it. I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first – by deed, the second – by word, the third – by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness

of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me... There must be acts of mercy, for even the strongest faith is of no avail without works. (Diary, 742). ...Write this for many souls who are often worried because they do not have the material means with which to carry out of mercy. Yet, spiritual mercy, which requires neither permission nor storehouses, is much more meritorious and is within the grasp of every soul. If a soul does not exercise mercy somehow or other, it will not obtain My mercy on the day of judgment. Oh, if only souls knew how to gather eternal treasure for themselves they would not be judged, for they would forestall My judgment with their mercy. (Diary #1317).

" Man attains to the merciful love of God, His mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbor" (14, Rich in Mercy)

We see Catechism of the Catholic Church lays out the spiritual works of mercy and the corporal works of mercy to explain ways of responding to the Lord's cry for us to be merciful. Our works of mercy are not limited to these "The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities... Instructing, advising, comforting are Spiritual Works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consists especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead." (CCC 2447).

Let us look at examples of how these works of mercy are lived out heroically in the lives of real people like you and me. May they be an inspiration to us to respond in kind to so much mercy received.

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

Feed and give drink to the thirsty

Several years ago while having lunch in downtown Miami a homeless girl- teenager came to the restaurant I was at asking the restaurant for food. I ordered a subway sandwich for her and gave it to her, and a few minutes afterwards her boyfriend came and she shared with him the sandwich. I felt very proud to be helping the two of them. We struck up a conversation and they explained to me how their parents had been angry with them, how they were trying to make their way back home, etc. In the middle of this we were standing in downtown Miami and another homeless man came by to ask the three of us for money, food. When the 2 teenagers turned around and saw the homeless man, the man realized they were in bad shape too, so he took back his request, and simultaneously the young guy stretched out his hand and instinctively offered his sandwich half to the hungry man. (We are all called to care for our brothers and sisters. I gave from the plenty, and they gave from the nothing they had.)Who needs to be fed in your life?

Give drink to the thirsty

There was once a young man whose parents, trying to improve their large family's finances, bought a large house that was to be used as a school for young ladies. Unfortunately, no student ever came. The family lost everything and the father was arrested and placed in debtor's prison. The 12 year old son was sent to work at a warehouse where he wrapped and labeled pots from eight in the morning until eight at night, Monday through Saturday, for very meager wages. He lived apart from everyone else in his family and under unbearable condition. He missed them terribly and visited them in prison daily. He was malnourished and suffered from painful bouts of colic. The warehouse where he worked was extremely run down, smelly, decaying, dirty and full of rats. The other kids he worked with were cruel. Later on in life looking back at his dismal stage in his life, he recalled he had had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no support, from anyone and if it were not for the mercy of God, (since no one took care of him) he might easily have become a little thief.

Although he only lived in these conditions for five months, the experience seemed an eternity He told his father: "No words can express the secret agony of my soul."But what this young man learned from this experience was not despair, but something amazing: In his study of this extraordinary man, Edgar Johnson said that "the blacking warehouse that made him a man of insuperable resolve and deadly determination, also made him for life a sympathizer with all suffering and with all victims of injustice." Another author

agreed that his dark period ...“he had forged an indissoluble bond of sympathy, even of identity, with the homeless, the friendless, the orphans, the hungry, the uneducated, and even the prisoners of London’s lower depths.”

His deprivation was so painful that he was determined to become generous. His alienation was so intolerable that he vowed that he would always be sympathetically united with the marginalized. He became one of the world’s most successful social revolutionaries. He helped to destroy, certain unjust institution, with his pen, merely by describing them. The boy was-Charles Dickens.

His sympathy for all human beings allowed him to spark a social justice revolution without losing sight of the inherent dignity of each person. On the one hand, all his writing seemed to say “Cure poverty”; on the other hand, it was fully in accord with Christ’s beatitude, “Blessed are the poor.” He was urging improvement in the social conditions of the working class, but at the same time he was showing that the people, despite their poverty, were still happy, and Scrooge, despite his wealth, was the picture of misery. (Charles Dickens’ pen satiated the masses, by moving the establishment to change the horrid working conditions). Who are the thirsty who need water in your life?

Clothe the naked

Fulton Sheen tells a story about a famous actress who wandered into his parish-St. Patrick’s in New York-crying and a bit hung over. In conversation with her Bishop Sheen learned she had been drinking on account of a gentleman, actually over two- as she did not know which one to love. She was not doing too well... Fulton Sheen told her to go home and sleep it off and if she came back the next day he could show her something. The young woman said, “No, because you are going to make me go to confession.” Fulton said, “No, I will not make you go to confession.” She said, “Promise.” So he said, “I promise I will not make you go to confession.” She said, very well and returned the next morning after some strong coffee and a good night’s sleep. When Sheen saw her he asked her to follow him and began showing her some paintings on the walls of his Church; when they arrived to the painting right next to the confessional, he pushed her in and closed the door.... He heard her confession and a few years later she left acting and became a cloistered nun. (He clothed the naked, not physically but who had been stripped of their vocation- their purpose in life.) Who needs to be clothed in your life?

Ransom Captives

There is a Chinese man who acted with amazing unselfishness during an earthquake. One day from his farm at the top of a hill, he noticed the ocean swiftly withdraw, like some monstrous animal crouching before a leap. He knew that the leap that was about to take place was a tidal wave. At the same time, he realized that his neighbors, working in the low fields, were in danger of being swept away by the ocean. Without a second thought, he immediately set fire to his own rice fields and furiously rang the temple bell. The Chinese neighbor’s saw the fire and immediately came to the help of their neighbor. The man’s heroic act saved the lives of his neighbors and the neighbors generous response to help their neighbor in need- saved their lives.(As the scriptures teach us, “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it” (Lk. 17:33).)Who needs to be ransomed in your life?

Shelter the Homeless

During one of the most devastating ice storms of the century, in 1998 in the eastern part of Canada, millions were left without electricity for weeks. A small farming and forestry town on the west side of Canada- Grand Forks, in British Columbia, heard of the disaster and they were determined to help their suffering neighbors in the east. The town decided to provide hospitality for 74 students.-ages thirteen to seventeen, plus four teacher-chaperones to come to Grand Forks. This is what they did:

Air Canada agreed to free up seventy-eight seats. Two hundred families volunteered to provide food and lodging. Grand Forks Secondary School organized committees for transportation, housing, and entertainment. When the “refugees” landed at the airport in nearby Kelowna, a local McDonald’s restaurant treated them to a free meal before they boarded buses for the ride through the mountains to Grand Forks and their first hot

showers in two weeks.. The town council presented them with T-shirts. Generous merchants enabled them to go bowling, attend hockey games, and watch the movie Titanic at the local theater.

Operation "Freeze Lift" was an immense success. The town opened its arms to its guests sheltering the homeless. Though they folks in Grand Fork were not rich, they shared the wealth of their generosity.

Who needs sheltering in your life?

Visit the Sick

Edwarda O'Bara was a mild diabetic. Around Christmastime in 1969, when she was sixteen, she caught the flu. Then, a few days later, she may have had a premonition of what was about to happen to her, she said to her mother: "Promise me, you won't leave me, will you, Mommy?" "Of course, not," replied her mother. "I would never leave you, darling, I promise. And a promise is a promise!"

That was the last conversation Edwarda had with her mother before she slipped into a diabetic coma that lasted for thirty years. True to her promise, Kaye O'Bara has dutifully and lovingly cared for her daughter round-the-clock. Except for a few days, Kaye is with her daughter all the time: feeding her every two hours, testing her blood and giving her insulin injections every four hours, bathing and massaging her, speaking and singing to her, caring for all her needs. She sleeps in a chair, but only in little intervals. Medical bills have been astronomical, and debts have continued to mount. (How is that for understanding and extending yourself over the life of the sick!) Who needs caring for, in your life?

Bury the dead

Thirty seven year old-Brad Barrows, of East Hartford, Connecticut, prayed that he would be able to do something exceptionally loving for someone. During prayer he felt a powerful call to donate a kidney. The call was so vivid and compelling that, in his judgment, "it sounded almost like a voice." Barrows contacted the National Kidney Foundation and was told that he did not qualify as a donor because he was neither dead nor had a friend or loved one in need of a kidney. Undeterred, he got in touch with the Hartford Transplant Associates. There he found a sympathetic ear in its coordinator, Cathy Drouin. However, she knew that the idea of donating an organ to a perfect stranger would be repugnant to the medical world and advised Barrows that, if he were determined to donate a kidney, he would first have to prove his sanity. The logic of generosity can easily resemble the delirium of madness. Or, as John Bunyan once said: "A man there was though some did count him mad, the more he cast away, the more he had."

Barrows did manage to get psychiatric clearance and was matched up with a suitable prospective recipient: Jose Spivey, age twelve, who was spending eleven hours a day on a home-dialysis machine. In addition, Jose had to leave his home in Cromwell, Connecticut, three times a week for three-hour sessions at Hartford Hospital. Brad not only gave Jose his Kidney, he befriended him by becoming Jose's Big Brother through the organization that connects boys who are lacking a father -with male mentors. What was most amazing was that Brad who was donating his kidneys, was himself, blind- but he knew he still had a lot to give. (More than burying the dead- Brad buried death). Who can you help by your life and who is mourning death in your life?

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

Teaching the Ignorant

In the 1930's there was a Religious sister named-Sr. Ignatia. Sr. Ignatia was an excellent musician. Though she excelled at her music and was very talented, she was obsessed with doing it perfectly, so much so that when a new pastor came in to the parish and he did not appreciate her musical talent, Sr. Ignatia had a breakdown. Her community asked her to leave her parish work and to work instead at St. Thomas hospital in the admissions desk, since she was not a nurse. She did not like the new assignment but she obeyed. In time her health returned and she asked if she could return to her music. The community told her, you could either be an unhealthy musician or a healthy-anything else. You choose, but know that your attachment to music is killing you.

So she stayed working at Admissions in St. Thomas hospital. Shortly afterwards she began to see that there were many alcoholics who came into the hospital to try to get better yet they were let go before they were healed because they did not fall into a "sick" category. Alcoholism at the time was not considered a disease, but rather a moral failing, so against regulations, she admitted them under different categories, usually "acute gastritis." She began to spend time with them and tried to help them by ministering to their spiritual needs... She noticed that their unhealthy attachment to alcohol, was the same as her obsessive attachment to her music. She taught them about God and their need to surrender to him for help. While, at St. Thomas hospital she treated a Dr. Bob and a Bill W, who eventually with her help founded now worldwide movement- Alcoholics anonymous. (It is estimated that Sr. Ignatia personally spiritually helped over 10, 000 alcoholics, and her indirect help to those who have joined Alcoholics anonymous and have learned to surrender themselves to God- is- countless.) Who needs instruction in your life?

Pray for the living and the dead

Dr. Bernard Nathanson was an obstetrician and of the leading abortion providers in the US. He oversaw the abortion of over 75,000, including performing the abortion of his own child. He helped found the organization now known as NARAL- Still one of the leading Pro-Abortion Organizations in the US. He was part of the small think-tank who helped coin the slogan, "Pro-choice." As he later admitted they needed to come up with a slogan that could sell, like a smoke-screen, to hide what he was trying to get the public to buy into. In the midst of all his killing he was befriended by an Opus Dei priest. The priest would call and love Dr. Nathanson for many years. He prayed for him and became his friend with the hopes of being able to help him leave behind the darkness he was in. Because of several reasons- and very strongly because of his priest friend- Dr. Nathanson not only stopped performing abortions, he eventually even entered the Catholic Church. He went from being an atheist to becoming one of the leading pro-life activists working untiringly until his death to undo all he had done. He made 2 movies, "Silent scream" and "Eclipse of Reason" graphically showing the evil of abortion procedures, he wrote several books and traveled the country to denounce the evil of abortion. (Having prayed for the living, Father rescued him from the dead). Who needs your prayers?

Correcting Sinners

There was a Mother in Poland, Maria Dabrowska who was very worried about the mischief's of her son. She did not want to leave him where he was at so one day after one of his pranks she exclaimed to him, "Raymond, what is to become of you, where will you end up if you keep acting this way?" The boy took his mother's admonishments seriously and prayed about the direction of his life. From that day on his life changed. One day the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him and offered him 2 crowns, a red one and a white one. The red one was for martyrdom and the white one was for purity. The Blessed Mother extended them both to him and asked him to choose. He chose them both. This Raymond later became Fr. Maximillian Kolbe, founder of the worldwide evangelization movement, the Militia Immaculata with circulars to build the civilization of love right at the rise of Nazism. He opened a friary in Poland and in Japan. Eventually he was imprisoned in Auschwitz, and eventually gave his life in place of a married man who was going to be executed. Blessed John Paul II canonized him as martyr for love. (Correction is sometimes as hard to give as it is hard to take. It means standing up for moral principles at work, at school, in politics, or at home. It means taking the time to even discipline. What would have become of his life, had his Mother not corrected Fr. Kolbe?) Who needs your correction?

Counsel the doubtful

Aunt Tilly was vacationing in Ireland. She was not used to operating a rented car, and distracted by the beauty of Ireland, she experienced the embarrassing misfortune of running out of gas and precisely at the moment she stopped at an intersection. Not knowing what to do, she remained frozen at the wheel for some time. The truck driver behind her, after witnessing the traffic lights pass through several cycles, finally decided to take action. He went over to Aunt Tilly's car, leaned his large frame toward her open window, and stated, in as restrained a manner as possible, "Would you be lookin' for a different shade of green, ma'am?" (It is amazing what kindness there is in extending a hand to those in doubt, even in these seemingly

insignificant moments.) Who needs your counsel?

Console the sorrowful

A group of monks had a one day off to go into town to take care of their needs, shopping, doctors, etc. One of the brothers could not fight off the temptation and went to see a prostitute. When it was time for them to return he saw his religious brother also coming and he was so downtrodden that he had decided he was going to leave the Order. He told his priest friend and the friend said. "Me too. I also gave in to temptation and went to a brothel, let us go together to accuse ourselves before our superiors." The downtrodden religious seeing that he was not alone decided to stay in the Order and so they both went together to accuse themselves. They were both treated accordingly. A few months later the superior learned that the Religious friend had not actually gone to a brothel like he had accused himself, rather he simply was trying to save the vocation of his brother. He knew the only way to be able to comfort the sorrowful brother was to accuse himself, so as to encourage him that we are all sinners and there would be no need for him to leave his vocation. (Amazing!) Who needs your support and consolation?

Bear wrongs patiently

Sor Elvira, lived with the reality of a large poor family whose father was dependent on alcohol. She often was left without her mother who would work as a nurse. In his illness, her father would drink much and made many demands on her- including commanding her to get him cigarettes at night even while she was already in bed. More difficult was the task usually given to her for being the oldest, of being sent to get her father out of the bar he was at night to bring him home. Sor Elvira acknowledges that all the suffering and difficulties she underwent taught her to be strong to bare with difficulties patiently and with long-suffering. She became a religious sister and later founded an organization called "Communita Cenaculo" It is a program for healing the alcoholic and the drug addict through prayer and work. They have houses in Italy, St. Augustine Florida and Medjugorje.... (Her bearing wrongs patiently allowed the Lord to use her to find help for those in need. If she had become bitter and acted as a victim for what was done to her, there would be thousands still enslaved by drugs and alcohol). How are you carrying your crosses? Are you carrying them patiently?

Forgiving Offenses

A priest once shared with me the sufferings of another woman, without revealing her name. The older woman had a husband who left her for a younger woman. Years later the older woman's x-husband shows up at her door and asks her if she can take him in. He had gotten sick and his younger wife had left him and he could not work. She forgave him and took him in; she worked for him and even began needing to take care of all his needs bathing him etc. As if this were not enough some time later the younger woman who had left with her husband also came knocking at her door. She had received an incurable cancer and had no one to care for her financially or physically. The older woman took her in also and cared for her for years until she passed away. She took care of both of them. She forgave the infidelity of her husband and she forgave the betrayal of her husbands' x-girl friend... (Our Lord calls us to forgive, 70 x 7 times- meaning always and everywhere). Who needs your forgiveness?

CLOSING

If we open ourselves up, we experienced God's mercy daily. And this message is so urgent that he also wants us to be partners in His work of Mercy by sharing with others His mercy, by being channels of mercy to others.

John Paul II felt that the particular task assigned to him by Divine Providence since the beginning of his pontificate was to bring to the world the message of the merciful Heart of Christ. The hour has come for the message of Divine mercy to be poured out as a message of hope upon all hearts and transform into the spark that sets a blaze a new civilization: a civilization of Love. In the words of the Holy Father at St. Faustina's canonization: "And you Faustina, gift of God for our times, gift from the land of Poland for the whole church, grant to us the ability to perceive the profoundness of Divine mercy, help us to experience it in our own lives

and to give testimony of it to our brothers and sisters. May your message of light and hope be disbursed in the whole world!"

St. Faustina prayed to our Lord during her spiritual exercises while on retreat in 1937 the following prayer, May we make it our own:

St. Faustina's Prayer

I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection, O Lord, May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbor's souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, that my ears may be merciful so that I may give heed to my neighbor's needs and not be indifferent to their pains and meanings.

Help me, O Lord that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness. My true rest is in the service of my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor.

I will refuse my heart to no one. I will be sincere even with those who, I know will abuse my kindness.

And I will lock myself up in the most merciful Heart of Jesus.

I will bear my own suffering in silence.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me. (Diary 163).

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