

Today, the Lord asks us to be the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world. How can we be salt and light? The salt itself is nothing as we know how unhealthy is we take it without anything else. When we are hungry, we cannot eat it. So, the salt is necessary when we use it as additive. Likewise, the light by itself is nothing. It can blind us. We can experience that when we stare at the sun. The light is useful when it enables us to see other things better. How are we salt and light then?

Isaiah points out some ways that we have come to call the corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting those in prison, visiting the sick. These are the classical works of mercy. The early Church did them and the Church does them today. They are tangible ways of being salt and light. These are things that we do personally or that we support through the parish, the poor box, and Catholic charities.

There are other works of mercy, other ways of being salt and light that we tend to forget. These works are called the spiritual works of mercy that we neglect a lot. They are also important because they address needs deeper than the body and they help the soul.

The first one is to correct the sinner, the correction that parents and friends give to those who are on the wrong path. Do we care enough about somebody to lead them to virtue, to be a spiritual guide or an example? Do we let our light shine to them? It is a work of mercy to try to be a moral wakeup call for somebody about whom we care.

The second spiritual work of mercy is to instruct the ignorant. It is surprising how much lack of knowledge there is in our world about the Church and how much prejudice. Do we try to dispel that when we have the chance? When people speak about our Church and are misinformed, it is a work of mercy to give them the truth.

The third work of mercy is to counsel the doubtful. Are we willing to let our own faith, our faith experience, give strength to others whose faith is wavering? Sometimes when people are too emotionally involved to make a clear decision, we can see the way more clearly than they. It is a work of mercy to let them see what we see.

Another work of mercy is to comfort the sorrowful. People carry pains in so many ways, not only from death in a family but from illness, a job loss. Are we willing to be strength to them when they are weak?”

Two other spiritual works of mercy are to bear wrongs patiently and to forgive all injuries. People are so quick today to lash out, to even the score, to strike back. Do we realize that sometimes we just have to absorb some of the pain of the world and not simply spread it around? To say “it stops here” is a work of mercy.

The last spiritual work of mercy is to pray for the living and the dead. We can always lift up in prayer our leaders, our friends and people to whom we don’t have a chance to speak. Everyone needs prayer.

These spiritual works of mercy are also ways of being salt and light. They affect not the physical condition of others but the spirit, the soul, the mind of others.

People admire the Church when it engages in the corporal works of mercy: hospitals, jail ministries, cooking, and various kinds of outreach. But when the Church talks about conversion, opening our lives to the truth of Christ, there the Church faces hostility. There are many physical needs people have. Many more people are desperately in need of the spiritual works of mercy.

It is not enough to say, “I’ll help the parish, diocese leader or others to be salt and light.” Every follower of Jesus is called to be salt and light. To do so does not require a generous checkbook but a generous soul.

The Lord calls us to be salt and light to our world, to light up consciences, minds and lives through the works of mercy, corporal and spiritual as well.