

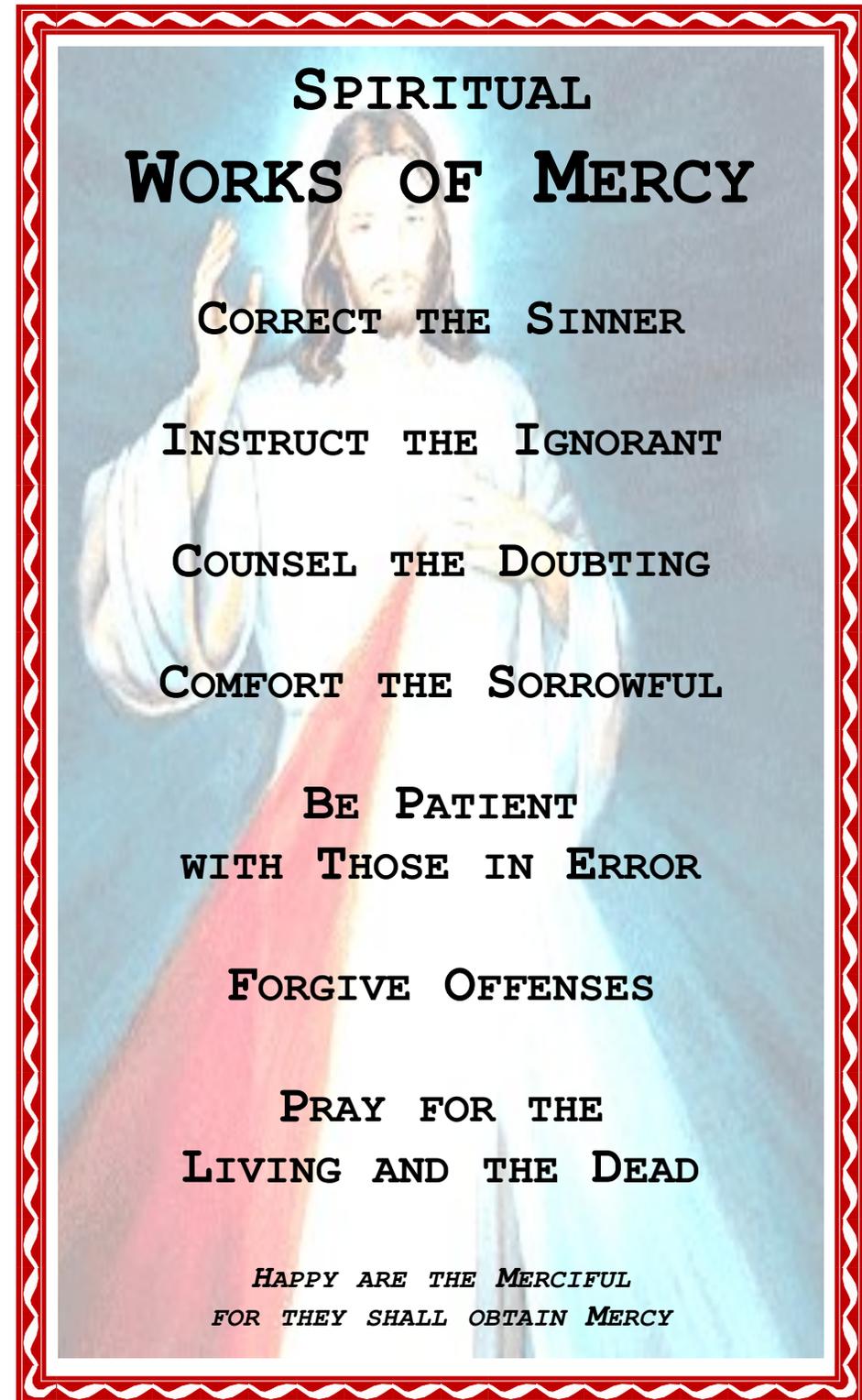
corporal works of mercy, but in passing, we can mention that the Catholic tradition identifies *seven spiritual works of mercy* and indicates where these are to be found in the New Testament.

They are as follows:

1. **To admonish the sinner.** (Matt. 18: 15-20; Cor. 3: 5-14; 1 Thess. 5: 12; 2 Thess 3: 15). Admonishment may take the form of good example or of disciplinary action.
2. **To instruct the ignorant.** (Rom. 11: 25; 1 Cor. 10: 1; 1 Tim 4: 6-16; 2 Tim. 4: 1-5; 1 Thess. 4: 13). To inform and correct misunderstandings because of ignorance of the true Gospel message.
3. **To counsel the doubtful.** (Lk. 24: 36-53; Jn. 20: 26-29). This counsel can take the form of direct advice or good example and concerns doubts about faith, oneself, or about relationships with others.
4. **To comfort the sorrowful.** (Jn. 11: 19; 1 Thess. 4: 13-18). This concerns an empathetic presence with another who is bereaved, lonely or alienated in order to cope with and grow through their struggles.
5. **To bear wrongs patiently.** (Matt. 16: 24; James 5: 7-11). This requires a strength to endure strain, stress, misunderstanding and evil without reacting and causing even more evil and suffering or becoming evil oneself.
6. **To forgive all injuries.** (Matt. 6: 15; 18: 21-35; Col. 3:13). Injuries are harmful acts received from others which can cause resentment, bitterness, hatred and a spirit of vindictiveness. Love and forgiveness can transform such experiences into reconciliation or at least a mitigation of injurious effects.
7. **Pray for the living and the dead.** (James 5: 16; Col. 1: 3, 9; 2 Macc. 12: 45). Prayers for the living and the dead express a permanent bond that unites all Christians in the community of saints.

FOR CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

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The Spiritual Works of Mercy

The Works of Mercy or Acts of Mercy are actions and practices which Christianity in general and the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church in particular consider expectations to be fulfilled by believers, and which are also recognized as spiritual aids... The word "spirituality" has been used to cover a wide range of religious experiences that have been evident throughout human history and found in all cultures inside and outside of formal religions. Perhaps we should speak of "spiritualities" rather than a single common spirituality. In fact, when we attempt to define "spirituality" the case could be made that, within certain limits, each person necessarily has his or her own unique spirituality.

While there are many forms of spirituality, there are two basic elements or dimensions within any mature spirituality: 1) to put oneself in the presence of God and 2) to be transformed by that personal encounter. If both dimensions are not present, any claim for a mature spirituality fall short. Some major questions remain: 1) Who is this God whom I seek?, 2) How do I go about the process of putting myself in His presence?, and 3) How will this encounter affect the way I lead my daily life?

The answers are: 1) For Christians, the foundational experience of God is in Jesus. 2) We can put ourselves in the presence of God through reading the Scriptures, celebrating the sacraments and personal meditation. 3) If we listen to the word's of Jesus in the Scriptures, He makes it simple. As he told the Pharisee; love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22: 34-39). In the First Letter of John (4: 7-12) this simple truth is again made clear: Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love... No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Thus the two basic dimensions of a mature spirituality go hand-in-hand. They must both be operative. If we simply attempt to put ourselves in the presence of God and our lives are not transformed, we have not truly heard and/ or responded to God's call. If we go about

our attempts to love self and others without the guidance of God, we risk being misguided and bring havoc instead of good. So, if we are to love self, others and the world as God wishes, where do mercy and the works of mercy fit in? First we must understand the meaning of mercy.

Mercy is simply love's concrete response to those in need and, of course, it can take many forms. When Scriptures speak of seeking and receiving God's mercy, they mean to speak of how God's love is sought or experienced by his people from the vantage point of their concrete needs—the need for freedom from slavery, the need for peace, the need to be forgiven, the need for the material things to sustain life. Mercy is love responding to those in need.

Given the ongoing needs of mankind, throughout the history of the Jewish/Christian experience of God, a central theme has been that of God's mercy was seen as exemplified in the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to a life of freedom. For Christians, the foundational experience of God is found in Jesus, who revealed a God who shows mercy to all, especially sinners, social outcasts and those in need of healing. The Gospels report that Jesus made a special effort to seek out the outcasts and the needy and would actually come to identify himself with every person in need (Matt. 25). Jesus' concrete acts of love for the needy—healing, forgiveness—were seen as acts or "works" of mercy.

Over the centuries, as Christians have endeavored to follow the example and teaching of Jesus, there developed a tradition in the Catholic Church of searching throughout the new Testament in order to identify "works of mercy", either performed by Jesus or required of his true followers. By definition, these works of mercy are those which are done freely and often go far beyond the demands of justice. This tradition separated these works into two categories -- spiritual works of mercy (concerned with the needs of the soul) and corporal works of mercy (concerned with the needs of the body). In another pamphlet we will concentrate on