

Guest Commentary: Practicing Works of Mercy Toward the Elderly
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Pope Francis has a “burning desire” during this special Jubilee year. He wants us to reflect on and practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy so that we may “enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy.”

Many of us memorized the works of mercy as children, but a little review might help us to “rediscover” them as this Jubilee Year gets underway. The corporal works include feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, healing the sick, visiting the imprisoned and burying the dead. The spiritual works of mercy include counseling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing sinners, comforting the afflicted, forgiving offenses, bearing patiently with those who do us ill and praying for the living and the dead.

Let’s take a look at how we can practice the first two corporal works of mercy toward the elderly , both on a material and spiritual level. We’ll begin with our bodily needs.

Your elderly Here are a few ways we can practice mercy by helping to feed and give drink to the elderly:

1. Take your elderly loved one or neighbor grocery shopping with you.
2. If that is not possible, offer to shop for them on a regular basis.
3. Gift the elderly with nutritious, home-cooked meals.
4. In addition to delivering meals to them, take the time to dine with your elderly neighbor or relative at home, or take them to their favorite restaurant from time to time. Many widows and widowers lack the motivation to cook for themselves when they live alone. Having a dinner companion on a regular basis could both improve their health and lift their spirits (and yours as well!).
5. Help a senior sign up for Meals on Wheels or access other similar resources.
6. Become a Meals on Wheels volunteer!
7. If your loved one is hospitalized try to be present at mealtime whenever possible to ensure that they have proper nutrition.
8. If your loved one resides in a long-term care facility bring favorite treats or nutritional supplements to stimulate their appetite. The care team can give you recommendations in this regard.
9. Ask your elderly loved one to share their recipes or expertise for making their favorite holiday or ethnic specialties. In addition to nourishing their body this will celebrate family traditions, honor their heritage and experience and create new memories. Sharing in this way could be even more enriching for you than for them!

These are just a few of the ways we can practice mercy by feeding the elderly. But as Christ said, no one lives on bread alone. Only Jesus can satisfy our ultimate hunger, since he himself is the Bread of Life. Just as it is often difficult for the elderly to get out grocery

shopping, they may also be unable to get to church to satisfy their spiritual hunger. An important way of feeding our older friends and relatives is to ensure that they are able to get to weekly or even daily Mass. If they are housebound, make sure someone in the parish brings them Holy Communion, or take responsibility for this yourself; it's a beautiful ministry.

Whether we bring an older person a pot of soup, a batch of homemade cookies, a bowl of fresh fruit or Holy Communion, we also bring them the warmth of our presence, our friendship and our solidarity. At the same time we encounter Jesus Christ himself, who will one day say to us, "When I was hungry you gave me to eat; when I was thirsty you gave me to drink. Come to the banquet in my Kingdom of Love!"

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