Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy

In his Convocation speech to his Deacons in the Archdiocese of Denver, Archbishop Samuel Aquila, made reference to the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep and brings them back to the flock. The Archbishop reminded the Deacons that it is their role to boldly search for the lost, looking for them in the crevices and the dark places of the world. When the Deacon finds these lost souls, he picks them up and carries them on his shoulders. He points the poor souls to the light of Christ, restoring them to health and the loving care of the parish community chiefly by means of practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

So, what are these spiritual and corporal works of mercy and how is the Deacon community applying these attributes of the Good Shepherd to the world?

Let’s begin with **Spiritual Works of Mercy**.

* *To instruct the* [*ignorant*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07648a.htm); The Deacon has a primary responsibility to assist with Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). It is important that any instructor have an informed level of understanding so as to be able to help others understand the faith and that the Church is mediator of all truth. It is not enough to simply state that the Churches teaches the truth and therefore one must believe, but that all teachings of the Church are for the common good in that they put man in right relationship with God and with each other.
* *To counsel the* [*doubtful*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05141a.htm); In the Gospel of St. Mark, the father of the boy possessed by the demon asked Our Lord to heal his son. When the Lord asked the father if he had faith, the father begged, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.” As Deacons, we all know of individuals, maybe even in our families, who cast doubt on the Church and on the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and His manifestation in our daily lives. We need to pray for each of these souls and ask God to help them in their struggles with faith. We also need to counter these arguments with beauty, love, and truth so that others understand what God has done for us.
* *To* [*admonish sinners*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04394a.htm); Pope Francis recently stated that we should recognize the difference between the sinner and the sin. We should also remember that we are sinners and need the mercy of God to help us overcome the temptations of darkness. Admonishing the sinner should always be done with humility and grace. As Deacons, we must also work to create a culture of goodness and love so that when the enemy tempts us we have the right equipment to resist his allurement. This is especially true in the public square.
* *To bear wrongs patiently*; It takes an incredible discipline to avoid going after someone who harms us or our character. Even the perception of inappropriate behavior can go a long way toward destroying a person’s integrity. On the other hand, becoming hostile and over aggressive can sometimes reinforce false perceptions. In many cases, the best way to prove someone wrong is to be prayerful and to live life with integrity.
* *To forgive offenses willingly*; Maybe the most difficult of the spiritual works of mercy is to forgive others of their offenses *willingly*. Yet, that is what Jesus did for us has he was dying on the Cross. Our first Deacon martyr also called on God to forgive the sins of his assailants. As Icons of Jesus Christ the Servant, we cannot hold grudges against others, even our enemies. But it is our responsibility to love - even in the face of corruption, evil, and injustice.
* *To comfort the afflicted*; The physically and spiritually suffering ones are those we are called to seek out and bring into the flock. This is especially true of those that feel they can never be forgiven and those that feel unworthy to approach the people of God. It is the hard work of the Deacon to pursue these souls but is extremely important to carry out if he is to imitate the Good Shepherd.
* *To* [*pray*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12345b.htm) *for the living and the* [*dead*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04653a.htm); Even though many parishes do not follow the practice, the Deacon is the one who should prepare the Universal Prayers of the Church. It is up to him to take the prayers of the faithful to Jesus through a special offering so that when the Chalice is prepared and handed over to the Celebrant, it contains all that burdens the many, allowing Jesus to participate in their struggles and joys. We should also never forget the faithful who have passed on into eternity—many of whom still need our prayers.

The Deacon also has a tremendous responsibility to the **Corporal Works of Mercy**

* *To feed the hungry*; A number of Deacons work at the Samaritan House to help the homeless and the hungry. In addition, many Deacons work in parish and societal food pantries across the Archdiocese. But it is also important to feed the hungry with “good things”. In particular, to feed them with the good news of the Gospel that we herald.
* *To give drink to the thirsty*; This work too can serve the homeless of the shelters and food pantries. Yet, it can also quench our Lord’s thirst. On the Cross, Jesus exclaimed, “I am thirsty” yet, He rejected the sponge of vinegar that was given Him. Why? Because His Thirst was for our Love. Those who went to the consolidated retreat might remember reflecting on our Lord’s desire for Deacons to share His Divine Mercy and Love with those in need.
* *To clothe the naked;* There are a number of locations that provide clothing to the poor and the naked yet, this work also serves as a reminder of our tendency to acquire many things even when we have no use for them. Let us make sure our unused items go to a location that can provide for those without adequate clothing and let us think twice about buying “things” that we are not likely to use. And the spiritual side of this work comes into play when we equip the uninformed for spiritual battle with the armor of Christ.

* *To shelter the homeless*; The reality of human trafficking has become a significant problem in our area. We have to be ready to respond to the needs, particularly of women and children, that are slaves to others or aimlessly roam the streets looking for a way out. There are programs that can help these individuals but they are often full and have a tremendous waiting list. This includes the Judy House were Deacons help support the residents and provide spiritual encouragement to the staff and the tenants.
* *To visit the sick;* Virtually every Deacon has an edict to visit a hospital or assisted living home of some sort. These are tremendous areas of evangelization and healing and an important work of our vocation that continues to grow. We are blest to be able to consult our Deacons who are also Doctors when the understanding of Catholic teachings on life issues is critical.
* *To ransom the captive*; The prison ministry is run by a Deacon and staffed by Deacons as well. The prisons and jails across this Archdiocese are filled with individuals who feel they will never find mercy; yet, they receive it through the actions and words of the Deacons. Additionally, those who are captured by addictions have ministries available to them through interaction with Deacons. This includes Courage and Encourage programs, Divorced Ministry Forums and others.
* *To* [*bury*](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03071a.htm) *the dead* In the early Christian Church this work was often carried out by Deacons who took bodies from the shore that were victims caught up in the storms while sailing the seas. Today, Deacons provide a ministry that allows God’s people to be buried with dignity as they await the coming of the Lord. The presence of a Catholic cleric reflects to the dying person and loved ones the compassionate face of Mother Church who invokes God’s forgiveness and healing. This holy journeying with family members is a ministry that they appreciate and don’t soon forget in their lives. Many grief ministries have been started and continue to thrive through the actions of the Deacons within the parishes.