

3. AVOID GOSSIP. Merciful people refrain from gossip because they know that gossip is another assault on an already injured person. Pope Francis tells us: “It is so terrible to gossip! At first it may seem like a nice thing, even amusing, like enjoying a candy. But in the end, it fills the heart with bitterness, and even poisons us” (Angelus, February 16, 2014).



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How will you keep yourself from gossiping about other people?

4. REFUSE TO RETALIATE. Merciful people don't hold a grudge or try to even the score. They let it go, give whatever happened to God, and forgive. Forgiveness allows you to let anger, hurt, and bitterness drain out of your heart. It restores a sense of peace to your soul. Without forgiveness you become a prisoner to your own resentments. With forgiveness, you mirror God's mercy.

Who are the people that you need to forgive?

5. DON'T TURN AWAY. When faced with an opportunity to be merciful, our greatest temptation is to look away. It's easy to rationalize that someone else is better able to help than you are. But the reality is, when we turn away from someone in need, we are turning away from Christ himself. If we want to be more merciful, we have to be willing to stand beside the other person — even if it makes our own lives more difficult. When we do that, we become more humble, kinder, and more compassionate.



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How do you deal with the temptation to turn away from someone in need?

6. CULTIVATE LITTLE KINDNESSES. Small chances for kindness arise every day. No opportunity for mercy is ever insignificant. Allowing another car to merge into your lane, calling a grieving friend, checking on an elderly neighbor, helping a co-worker, and holding the door for someone are just a few examples. Sometimes, a smile or a word of encouragement can change a person's whole outlook.



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What are some of the small acts of mercy that you can do every day?

7. ACCEPT MERCY FROM OTHERS. It takes humility to admit that we, too, are in need of mercy. When you allow others to be merciful to you, you give them the opportunity to reach outside of themselves and enter into your pain. When that happens, they become instruments of God's love to heal and comfort you.

In what ways have you accepted mercy from other people?

8. PRAY FOR MERCY. Pray to become more merciful. Pray also for family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and people you know who are in need of mercy. Pray for people who have hurt you. Pray for people around the world who are suffering. Pray that everyone in the world will respond to God's mercy and, in turn, be merciful to one another.



THINKSTOCK

How will you pray for mercy, and for whom will you pray?

Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7). Our efforts to become more merciful will not only change the people around us, they will change us as we become ever kinder and more compassionate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Books

A Pocket Guide to Living the Divine Mercy, Rev. George W. Kosicki (Our Sunday Visitor, 2009).

New Beginning, New Hope: Words of Pope Francis Holy Week through Pentecost (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

Only Love Can Save Us: Letters, Homilies, and Talks of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

Through the Year With Pope Francis: Daily Reflections, Ed. Kevin Cotter (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

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EIGHT WAYS TO
Live a
Merciful Life



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STEFANO SPAZIANI

“God is so merciful toward us. We too should learn to be merciful..”

— Pope Francis



NEWS.COM

People are talking about mercy again! And it's all because Pope Francis is awakening our world to the need for mercy. He proclaimed that "this is the season of mercy." Francis calls it "a new era," and he urges each of us to "travel this path of mercy." He tells us that "mercy is the Lord's most powerful message," and he hopes that we will "find a form of mercy for all."

We need mercy because we live in an imperfect world. We all know people who have suffered a death in the family, a serious illness, divorce, a job loss, or some other personal tragedy. We have heard shocking stories of violence, oppression, poverty, prejudice, and abuse. And while we can't stop every bad thing from happening, Pope Francis believes that we can become more merciful in our response to people in need.

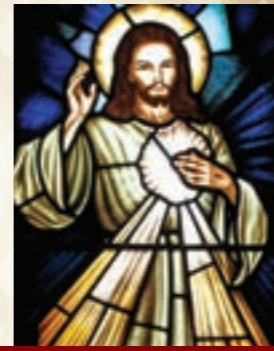
WHAT IS MERCY?

We tend to think of "mercy" as compassion or sympathy, but the word has a much deeper meaning. It is more than feeling sorry for someone. Having mercy means that we enter into the other person's suffering. We feel the other person's pain, see through the other person's eyes, and place ourselves inside the other person's heart and mind. When that happens, we are moved to respond in a merciful way.

We can be merciful because God is merciful. "The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. The LORD is good to all, compassionate toward all your works" (Ps 145:8-9). Mercy grows in us as we reflect on how God has been merciful with us.

DEVOTION TO DIVINE MERCY

The Divine Mercy devotion, based on the apparitions and diaries of St. Faustina Kowalska, instills in us a deep understanding of the love and mercy of God. We are encouraged to pray daily for divine mercy in our own lives and trust that Jesus will give us everything we need to be instruments of God's mercy to others. St. Faustina's feast day is October 5. Divine Mercy Sunday is the First Sunday of Easter. Additional information can be found at www.thedivinemercy.org.



WITTMAN



RENATA SEDMAKOVA / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Jesus Is Our Model of Merciful Living

Throughout his life, Jesus responded with mercy to people in all walks of life. He befriended the rich and the poor, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, a Roman centurion, and a Samaritan woman. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and fed the hungry. He grieved when his friend Lazarus died, accepted the human weakness of his disciples, and forgave the people who crucified him.

Mercy was not generally practiced in the time of Jesus. The Romans considered mercy a weakness. The Pharisees were so self-righteous that they showed little mercy. But the people who experienced the mercy of Jesus were transformed, and they became merciful to others. In fact, in the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the early Christians followed in the merciful footsteps of Jesus.

The Works of Mercy

The Church gives us the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to inspire us to action.



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The **corporal works of mercy** focus on physical needs:

- feed the hungry
- give drink to the thirsty
- clothe the naked
- shelter the homeless
- visit the sick
- visit those in prison
- bury the dead

The **spiritual works of mercy** center on spiritual and emotional needs:

- instruct the ignorant
- counsel the doubtful
- admonish the sinner
- comfort the sorrowful
- forgive injuries
- bear wrongs patiently
- pray for the living and the dead

You probably practice many of the corporal works of mercy through food and clothing drives, visits to the sick and homebound, and attending wakes and funerals. You practice the spiritual works of mercy when you share your faith, spend time listening to someone who is going through difficulties, forgive those who hurt you, and pray for living and deceased family members and friends.

But what if you decided to become even more merciful?

1. DARE TO REALLY CARE. Allow yourself to look beneath another person's surface needs and feel what that person is going through. Maybe it is physical pain. Or, maybe it is loneliness, rejection, discouragement, or fear. Imagine that you are seeing this person through the eyes of Jesus. Then decide how you can help that person.



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How would your life change if you began to really care about other people?

2. DON'T JUDGE. Merciful people don't say, "You got what you deserved," or "You caused this yourself." Maybe the person did act recklessly, or refused to see a doctor, or continued to smoke or eat junk food. Let God be the judge of what happened. You are called to offer mercy and help in whatever way you can — no matter what the circumstances.



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What attitudes would you have to change in order to stop judging others?