

sr. M. Diana Kuczek ZMBM

14 WAYS

TO DO WORKS OF MERCY



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Title of the original | *14 sposobów na miłosierdzie*

Translated by | Elżbieta Woszczyna

Front page design | sr. M. Eliana Chmielewska ZMBM
Illustrations | sr. M. Barbara Wolańska ZMBM

Nihil obstat | Rev. Jan Machniak
Imprimatur | Bishop Jan Szkołoń
Kraków, November 30, 2018. No. 3526/2018

Misericordia Publications
of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy
al. Adolfa Hyły 1, 30-605 Kraków
Online store: www.misericordia.faustyna.pl

Kraków 2024
ISBN 978-83-66093-12-6

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INTRODUCTION

Oh my Jesus, teach me to open the bosom of mercy and love “to everyone, who asks for it. Jesus, my Commander, teach me so that all my prayers and deeds may bear the seal of Your mercy” (Diary 755).

Saint Faustina who is endowed with mercy, wishes to share it with all those who need mercy the most. She knows that somewhere out there, where lights of hope cannot penetrate, where piercing pain shoots through the bones and tears keep running down cheeks stricken with suffering – there wait suffering human beings for you and for me to reach for and comfort. You can hear their silent cry and in their sad eyes you may discern the need for a meeting with another person. This presence alone becomes a place of appearance, where it is enough for you to just be present there, so that your silence could cover thousands of words, which despite of being unable to soothe the suffering, could still put up a cloak of hope during the encounter. Remember: it is important for you to be present. The rich soil of presence receives his words. Let’s say the words of a man on his way as well as and your own words – and slowly the rock of pessimistic thoughts and ideas breaks away, leaving room for a new perspective: “there appears the sun after the storm, and after the night, there rises a new day”. The other person for whom you act like a friend becomes *homo viator* – a pilgrim. You

are always with another man; you are with your fellow brother on the road! This is a mountain trail and climbing, often bearing the Cross, you become an evangelical Simon, but no one had forced you: you had chosen to devote yourself to your fellow brothers; you had made your decision and selected your path: the spirituality of mercy. At first glance, you may have gained the knowledge to comprehend this world, however, is it truly possible for one person to entirely understand another, who has attained love which can endure all things.

“I am learning how to be good from Jesus, from Him who is Goodness Itself, so that I could be called a daughter of heavenly Father” – admits Saint Faustina. Only God Himself in the body of Jesus Christ has become fully man. We are His disciples, inept and blundering, along the paths of life, always restless. Both your own and my paths of mercifulness are spread open so that we may eagerly observe someone who starts to resemble a true person, seemingly thanks to us. It is vital not to be discouraged and deterred from this path – “we must always strive upward...” – called Karol Wojtyła in his *Tryptyk rzymski [Roman Triptych]*, up until our very last days, with a renewed spirit to face winding human labyrinths. There is a space in a human, which saves one from oneself, from despair – sometimes justified – it is a will of the senses, as Viktor Frankl reminds us. In the depths of your and my own innermost being, there exists a life-giving force: *imago Dei*, which can read the cards of the Book of Life in a proper light. It is trust. Sometimes

it is necessary to inflict pain on a person, so that they could regain their full life and cease to merely vegetate. We may only experience this when we are looking in from a distance, we can try to discover the subjective beauty characteristic of a journeying human. Distance does not denote formalism, it arises as a result of us respecting limits and justice, and without them, no human relation could be fruitful. The spirituality of mercy reaches the boundaries of human misery and despair by filling in the empty vessel of somebody's life, just like the 14 stations on the Way of the Cross, invite each of us to challenge our weakness, sins and loneliness. Among the numerous attempts at struggling with ourselves and the outer world, we lose our vision and become short-sighted to finally just turn blind with time. The rays of the selfless and patient love become a canal, through which another person may discern his or her own inner light and free themselves from life's blindness. This light, which they carry inside of themselves, is like fire – it needs the blast of mine love and yours to be set aflame, and at the same time, to burn down all that took away their own life. The fire allows to see further and deeper the condition of seemingly hopeless things. As for you and me – do we have enough love inside of us that by purely loving our brethren, we would be bringing them back to life? Do we allow the pain, uncertainty and burden of such a love, which teaches us of how to cross even the gates of prison?

With Sister Faustina we stand at the foot of a mountain. With fear and joy we look at the top – there are so many

unknown quantities. In the 14 stations of mercy – we have the inimitable chance to meet God in humankind, without the unnecessary philanthropy and not merely for show, but within the innermost part of our being. The desire to revisit the old schemes of egoism and finding footing only in compassion lurks behind each corner. With us we take a rucksack of various necessities. However, nothing will make up for a fellow human companion. We need someone's presence, so that we would not fall victim to despair or lose the way. The act of "becoming a person of mercy", our longing to achieve the fullness of humanity is like a path. A trip up the mountain. Only Love is capable of giving us strength to "constantly move up" and never surrender. Let us move forward then! The time has come!

Krakow, 18th of April,
The 25th Anniversary of the beatification of Sister Faustina

**14 WAYS
TO DO WORKS OF MERCY**

PART I

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY



Feed the hungry



FEED THE HUNGRY

Matthew, the Evangelist on the pages of the Spirit-filled Works writes: “*Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink*” (Mt. 25:31). This is one of the stories providing answers to this question. “In 1933 my tiny village got stricken with terrible famine. As a small infant I lied on the bench near the kitchen and I was dying of starvation. Beside me, there stood my mother, looking at me helpless. My father went to the parish priest and said: ‘My son is dying of starvation.’ This priest went to the hiding place and found some tiny pieces of gold. The day before the thieves broke into the church and smashed the chalices, before taking them away. When leaving in a hurry they left fragments of the broken chalices which were later found by the parish priest. Owing to this gold and some coins the parents were able to buy food in the grocery store, where it could only be purchased for gold or foreign currency. This food saved my life”.¹ In the modern world, the disturbing statistics inform us about the ever-growing death toll of the innocent: the children, youth and elderly, because of lack of food. At the same time, dumping sites are overfilled with tons of thrown away bread – forever wasted

1 S. Klimaszewski, *Uczynki miłosierdzia* [Works of Mercy], Warszawa 1998, p. 18.

chances, to save somebody's life. In 1992, the income of 20 percent of people (the richest countries) was 72 times bigger compared to the income of 20 percent of the poorest ones. In 2012, 20 percent of people (the richest countries) had 130 times larger income as compared to 20 percent of the poorest nations, whereas in 1820 this difference was only three to two. The problem of famine is a global phenomenon. The solution for this problem requires from human kind much more than merely money². It is instantly confronted with the evangelical calling: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and gave you food" (Mt. 25: 31). The question that rankles many people arise:

How does a hungry man look at you?
How does God look at him?

The Spirit-filled Prophet Isaiah expresses God's attitude towards the dignity of each person, including the poorest one: "(...) Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you" (Isa. 43:4). When someone suffers hunger and is therefore forced to ask for help, they may easily doubt and question their dignity and value. No one is comfortable with the situation of being forced to humiliate themselves and ask for bread. This reveals

² See: W. Królikowski (ed.), *Świat ludzkich głodów. Wokół Reguł służących zaprowadzaniu ładu w jedzeniu św. Ignacego Loyoli [A Word of Human Hunger. About the Rules Serving to Bring Harmony in Nourishment According to Saint Ignatius Loyola]*, Kraków, 2012, p. 9-10.

their helplessness in life and inability to cope with the conditions of existence in our complex society. It also denotes that they have hit the bottom in various dimensions of their lives. They crossed the line of humanity, which may only be restored by the merciful presence of fellow brothers and sisters. In a situation like this, a truly merciful person kneels with affection and lifts the suffering person up from the state of humiliation, hunger and despair. A truly merciful person, while executing works of mercy does not differentiate between people in regard to their social status³.

The poor have always been in the very centre of the Church community since this is what God is like, whose love is selfless. It is difficult to discern in another person their beauty, invariable value and dignity of a child of God. This is especially important when the person in need is not capable of realizing this anymore and thinks of him or herself with contempt or hatred. How many Lazaruses do we meet every day who keep crying to us for alms of bread. Saint Faustina was especially sensitive in this respect. She strove to serve with respect to all the poor, even those who revisited the gate for the second time. In her spiritual *Diary*, she wrote:” when the same poor people come to the gate a second time, I treat them with greater gentleness and I do not let them see that

³ See: *Izaak z Niniwy* [in:] *Miłosierdzie. Mądrość Ojców Kościoła*, [Isaiah of Nineveh, [in:] *Mercy, The Wisdom of the Fathers of the Church*], Kraków, 2015, p. 92.

I know they have been here before, [I do this] in order not to embarrass them. And then they speak to me freely about their troubles and needs”⁴ (Diary 1282).

Do I discern in myself and in other people the unique and inimitable value and dignity of a beloved child of God? Do I truly believe that each person is God’s V.I.P.?

Let us explore the essence of the encouragement directed to us in the first corporal act of mercy: *feed the hungry*. We will do so by drawing from the richness of God’s Word and wisdom of the Saints.

The hungry – longing for bread only?

In the Old Testament, famine fell within the category of punishments that God sent upon the people of Israel, to call them to be faithful to the Covenant made with Him (the sword, the famine and the pestilence – these are the plaques of God’s Judgment”⁵ (Jr. 14:12). For them, the lack of food was also a trial of faith since they did not resist the temptation of pride and self-sufficiency. Yahweh wished to reveal to them, that He Himself is the

⁴ Siostra Faustyna Kowalska, *Dzienniczek. Miłosierdzie Boże w duszy mojej* [Zgromadzenie Sióstr Matki Bożej Miłosierdzia [Sister Faustina Kowalska *The Diary. The Divine Mercy in My Soul*], Kraków 2001, p. 74.

⁵ See X. Leon-Dufour (ed.) *Słownik teologii biblijnej* [*The Dictionary of Biblical Theology*], Poznań–Warszawa 1973, p. 208.

Giver of all Good. This experience of physical hunger was meant to let the Israeli reveal the deeper hunger inside of them: The hunger for God's Word and a relationship with God. All types of hunger starting from the physical one, through hunger for material possessions, hunger of emotions, knowledge, and the hunger for personal development all lead us to the most important of all: the hunger for God. This hunger is located in our innermost being – the core of “me” in each human.

Jesus was subject to the trial of hunger as well. The Devil tempted Him, to command that stones became loaves of bread. He lured Him into thinking that food became His god, for which He should renounce His love for His Father. Jesus retorted firmly that: “A man does not live by bread alone but by every Word, that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:1-11). We see that in His decisions Jesus was not driven by purely biological needs. He was not thinking about satiating the need for sleep and food. He looked at life from God's perspective. He invites us to act accordingly and to become genuinely free people who know the value of fasting due to our own choice and not necessity.

Each man as a free human being, may freely decide to experience the lack of something: for example, food or drink. It is important that the decision to renounce food is made in one's heart and mind and is set to God alone. One should be realistic though: first our senses desire food only to allow our heart to long for God. Jesus, when suffering hunger in the wilderness, knew well that

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"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph 2: 10). This awareness fills me with joy. I am a person created by God. Saint Paul writes: "I am His creation". Good and merciful God appointed me, so that I have my share in the love of the Holy Trinity and love myself and my brothers with the love which He Himself poured into my heart. How good is Almighty God! How much He has trusted me! Jesus desires that my faith and love be expressed in deeds. Before the ages began, I had been prepared and summoned to fulfil this mission, so that the will of the Father who desires my happiness and salvation be fulfilled in this way.

Nevertheless, it is with great apprehension that I look at the contemporary world full of relativism, consumptionism and conformism. I often think that the world of values belongs to the past, whereas subjectivism and individualism keep directing me towards my needs only. The history of sin and evil continues ceaselessly, winning over new followers. The power of evil seems appalling and overwhelming. Still, I do not lose hope in God's mercy. Jesus redeemed me in the work of salvation, accomplished in the passion and death on the cross, but He rose again the third day.

The victory is on the side of good, on the side of the Almighty God. I am looking for the methods to share the mercy I have experienced in my life... I can enumerate at least 14 of such works comprising: 7 corporal and 7 spiritual works of mercy. With Saint Faustina I embark upon a journey to meet God in my brothers and sisters with an aim to become fully human.



ISBN 978-83-66093-12-6



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