

“... neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”

[Luke 16: 31.]

### How not to show mercy – and the consequences

This is our fourth parish group sheet for the Year of Mercy based on the material sent to us by the Bishop for discussion. In this Teaching we reflect on Mother Teresa, the reality of hell, and examples of persevering in doing good.

In his 1994 book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Saint Pope John Paul II wrote that too often “preachers, catechists, teachers . . . no longer have **the courage to preach the threat of hell**” [p. 183]. So, I thought I’d have a go now! And I do this because our parable we have been asked to reflect on prompts us to consider hell. It is a truth which you might not want to be faced with, but which our parable today makes very clear: it **is** possible to go to hell and never be able to get out. It will be like spending an eternity unable to fulfil a yearning heart to see the face of God, never to complete our existence for which we were made.

I sometimes hear people say, on the one hand, that when wicked people die, they just get annihilated; they cease to exist. This is not true. And on the other hand, I sometimes hear people say that in the end, even though there might be a period of darkness for those who die in mortal sin, in the end, God will transform everything and bring us all to heaven. This is not true either.

The Bible does not teach that Christians have a guarantee of heaven. There can be no absolute assurance of salvation. Remember the parable of the sheep and the goats? Jesus clearly speaks of those who will go to eternal punishment. [Matthew 25:46.]. St Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “Remember God’s severity as well as his goodness: his severity to those who fell, and his goodness to you as long as you persevere in it; if not, you too **will** be cut off.” [11:22.] Elsewhere St. Paul says, “Everyone, no **matter** how firmly he thinks he is standing, must be careful he does not fall.” [1 Corinthians 10:12.] In both of these Readings St. Paul is saying that **it is possible** for Christians to lose the salvation that Jesus has won for us. It is possible to go to hell.

There is a hell because we have the freedom to choose evil instead of serving God. To choose away from God is what hell is. God doesn’t choose to send us there. That choice is entirely up to us. Thus, the issue that some will go to hell is decided, but the issue of who in particular will go to hell is undecided, because, in a way, it is up to us and the way we choose to live & die – either in communion with God through Jesus Christ, or in rebellion with God, turning our backs on God and going it alone, like self-sufficient gods. [Much of the above from *Catholic Answers*.] Naturally, I hope that this truth about hell will encourage us to **persevere in doing good** – to never give up, no matter how hard. Also, I hope that we will look for opportunities to correct any wrong notions about the possibility of eternal damnation – not to scare or frighten people, but to make sure they know the truth. Because it is their eternal salvation which is at stake!

The more we can encourage people to persevere in doing good, the more they will develop good habits and avoid the road to hell. We have the perfect programme set before us in this Jubilee Year by Pope Francis. He proposes a deep rooted conversion in the Church, in the Body of Christ, which he sums up by encouraging the corporal & spiritual works of mercy as the everyday road we are called to travel. These are **the good things** in which we are called to persevere, and by our example, encourage others to persevere in as well.

These works of mercy were the very foundation of Jesus’ Mission which he proclaimed in the synagogue of Nazareth at the beginning of his pastoral ministry. It is Jesus’ mission in which we are called to participate by bringing, as Pope Francis has written in his Document on the Holy Year [*Misericordiae Vultus*] *a word and gesture of consolation to the poor, to proclaim liberty to those bound by new forms of slavery in modern society, to restore sight to those who can see no more because they are caught up in themselves, to restore dignity to all those from whom it has been robbed*. How do we build into our lives and develop in our lives as an ordinary part of our daily living these good things, these works of mercy?

We have our parable today as a starting point. It prompts us to reflect on our personal response to poor people. For example, the poor people we see sitting at our doors on the streets of our towns and cities. But also in this global consciousness that we all have today due to modern communications, we are prompted to think about our response to the world's poor. And how can we not ignore the poor clamouring at the doors of Europe escaping war, and encamped in Calais straining to see the white cliffs of Dover?

We have **the three parish cafes** which are ideal environments for Volunteers to look for opportunities to be engaged in the material and spiritual works of mercy. Why not Volunteer once a month to be part of the Team at one of these cafes? **By way of inspiration** for this type of work of mercy project, as well as the **Freedom Project in Bolsover**, already mentioned in a previous Teaching, I was at the meeting of the Shirebrook Clergy a few weeks ago and we had a presentation by the founder of an inspirational Project called **Super Kitchen**, started in Nottingham in 2013, who create *shared social eating spaces with surplus food supplied by Fareshare*. [utilising somewhere like the Village Hall in Shirebrook, for example.] People are encouraged to come and meet and share a meal for a very small price, knowing that they are preventing some of the food waste from supermarkets and other outlets going into landfills, and discovering the benefits as they eat of *community, connection and conversation*. They say that meeting together like this has *a massive effect on people's wellbeing, the wellbeing of the local community and the planet*. It prevents hunger, helps overcome loneliness and saves the planet!

The Super Kitchens open as often as the organisers can manage- some for a few hours once or twice a month, others five days a week. The Super Kitchen Team provide all the back-up and support needed to set up a local Super Kitchen. The local Council in Shirebrook are very keen in exploring this for Shirebrook and asked the Churches first if they were interested in supporting it. Kirkby in Ashfield, Worksop and Mansfield Woodhouse all have examples of the Super Kitchen model. See the website: [www.superkitchen.org](http://www.superkitchen.org). for details. **On Friday 1<sup>st</sup> April in Shirebrook Town Square** the local Council has invited Super Kitchen to bring their mobile lorry with its fully equipped kitchen and provide low price meals for the people of Shirebrook. This event will give us an idea of local interest. Why not make it a date?

**Not everyone will be supportive** of whatever local works of mercy we engage in, and just as some people in the parable *will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead*, others will not be convinced by initiatives of mercy which bring local people together, and a healing and new life to individuals, to a neighbourhood or town. I was reminded of this when I read a news article on yahoo.com about the announcement that **Mother Teresa** is to be canonised by Pope Francis in September at St. Peters. The article said some positive things about Mother Teresa, but the writer felt, perhaps in the interest of balance or more likely reflecting our unbelieving culture, felt that it was necessary to report criticisms of Mother Teresa. These criticisms showed a lack of understanding of her Catholic moral stance and lack of understanding of the area of mercy and compassion in which Mother Teresa and her Missionaries engage.

The article spoke of *the missionary who became a global if controversial symbol of compassion for care for the sick & destitute*. Calling her the "**Angel of Mercy**" or "**Saint of the Gutters**", it went on to say *she was also a controversial and divisive figure with critics branding her a religious imperialist whose fervent opposition to birth control and abortion was contrary to the interests of the communities she claimed to serve*. The article quoted Germaine Greer and Christopher Hitchens *accusing her of contributing to the misery of the poor with what they saw as her dogmatic views*, probably thinking of her description of abortion as *direct murder by the mother herself*. Needless to say **I do not accept these criticisms**. Mother Teresa followed Catholic Teaching and served the poor people literally discarded by their families and by society, people who are invisible to any semblance of a local welfare state. I prefer **Pier Paolo Pasolini's description of Mother Teresa** also quoted in this article: *she had an almost virile jaw and gentle eye that in its gaze "sees"*. She was a combination of *goodness without sentimentality, someone with no expectations who is both calm and becalming, powerfully practical*. Mother Teresa's story is **an inspiration for anyone who aspires to be the embodiment of the corporal & spiritual works of mercy**.  
That's it for now. God bless you. Fr. Jonathan.