

Fr. Joe Chapter 11 ~ St. Vincent de Paul In his own words...

Some parishes have a St. Vincent de Paul group. Members will meet regularly, take up collections to reach out and help others in need. This was impossible in our small missions; however, we did not neglect the poor and needy. When a need was called to my attention, I would call on anyone at any time and they would reach out. It was more often in service than with money.

One spring a farmer became ill and he was unable to finish planting his crops. He was becoming depressed. I asked one of our young men to help, and he was glad to. He worked in Cincinnati, but when he got off of work, he grabbed a bite to eat, went to this farm and he plowed, cultivated and planted all evening. Just before daylight, he'd go back home, grab a few hours of sleep then drive to Cincinnati to work. He did this for several nights until he finished the farmer's fields. He took nothing for his trouble, he was just glad to help.

There is a very old and sick lady to whom I brought Holy Communion. She lived in two rooms without electricity. I called two men who were willing to wire her house and we brought her an old refrigerator. This enabled her to care for herself a while longer before she died.

Two elderly women who had no car needed some household items and new shoes. I did not want to drive them alone in my car, so I called two young housewives and asked them to drop what they were doing. We were going to take these elderly sisters to Milford on a shopping trip. They did not say, "No," although I know what they were thinking inside.

Two families needed food at Thanksgiving. One family had nine children, so I brought them a turkey with all of the trimmings. Across the road were an elderly woman and her grown son. I brought her a chicken with all of the trimmings. She flared up in anger and told everyone how unjust I was because her neighbor had received a turkey, but she had only gotten a chicken.

One day a gentleman stopped at the rectory and told me he lived in Central Ohio and wanted money to get home. He said he would pay it back and asked me for my name and address. After I talked to him for a while, I finally gave him the money and kissed it good bye. Several months later a woman stopped in and told me her husband was a traveling salesman and often drank too much. When he died, she found my name and address in his wallet and if he owed me anything, she wanted to pay it back.

One morning on my way to Mass, I saw a car parked on the side of the road and a nicely dressed woman was standing by it. I stopped and asked her, "What's wrong?" She had a flat tire. I told her, "I'll be right back." I drove to the church, told the people that Mass would be later, told the server, "Come with me," and we drove back to the woman and her car. I told the server to change her tire. When he finished, she opened her purse and got out some money. I told her, "Ma'am, we don't do this for money, we do it for Jesus Christ." The server never did forget it and never let me hear the end of it.

In the Gospels, Jesus reached out to help the poor and needy. He emphasized the importance for us to do the same. Even to the extent that when we do so, we do it for the least of our brothers and sisters, we are doing it for him.

All of us are familiar with the corporal works of mercy, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and shut-ins, but we are not aware of the spiritual works of mercy.

For example, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, bare wrongs patiently and forgive moral injuries. A good Christian will reach out to answer all of these needs. A good St. Vincent de Paul member wishes to combine them in their ministry to the needy. This is what makes us different from government agencies, welfare programs or the Red Cross who also reach out to give help. But we cannot always respond to Jesus' calling on a person on an urgent basis. We can do so by providing a program that does these things.