

When one thinks of the concept of “mercy” one’s thoughts most often point towards Theology or Philosophy; however, man’s ability to help man relies in a great part on the Sciences. From basic medical advances, like antibiotics and vaccines, to large-scale agriculture, to clean energy technology, or to clean water reclamation, and beyond, all of us depend on science to show us the way to alleviate suffering and to feed and house the world’s ever increasing population.

True *mercy* and forgiveness for sin is a power attributed only to God. However, humans can be kind and perform acts of “corporal mercy” through charitable acts of compassion, including the sharing of scientific breakthroughs and knowledge. In that way the sciences embrace the inherent meaning of the word “catholic,” which at its core means ‘all-embracing and universal’. Science, *scientia*, means knowledge; knowledge to be shared and for all.

Pope Francis, a vocal advocate for taking action against climate change has stated it best in his own words. Christians should use the holy year of mercy to ask forgiveness for their ‘sins’ against the environment and to ‘acknowledge our sins against creation, the poor and future generations.’

On the World Day of Prayer, September 1<sup>st</sup>, Pope Francis entreated the world to protect the environment.

“Global warming continues: 2015 was the warmest year on record, and 2016 will likely be warmer still. This is leading to ever more severe droughts, floods, fires and extreme weather events. Climate change is also contributing to the heart-rending refugee crisis. The world’s poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact.”

"We usually think of the works of mercy individually and in relation to a specific initiative: hospitals for the sick, soup kitchens for the hungry, shelters for the homeless, schools for those to be educated, the confessional and spiritual direction for those needing counsel and forgiveness ... But if we look at the works of mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces," Pope Francis said (Dewan & Isaac).

And, this includes caring for the Earth.

<b>Corporal works of Mercy</b>	<b>Modern Translation &amp; Implementation</b>
Feed the Hungry	Do not waste food; advocate for Food Justice, Safety & Reliability
Give Drink to the Thirsty	Save water; provide access to Clean Water worldwide
Shelter the Homeless	Give refuge to those Migrating or Emigrating due to War
Visit the Sick	Donate blood and offer assistance to caregivers as well as the sick
Visit the Prisoners	Remember all children and families in need
Bury the Dead	Comfort those that mourn
Give Alms to the Poor	Donate time and effort to a charitable organization

Adapted from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Unfortunately, 783 million people do not have sufficient access to clean water, and 1.8 billion people globally use a source of drinking water that is contaminated with feces. Large numbers of people living in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, totaling over 2.6 billion people or 39% of the world's population, live without access to improved sanitation, which hygienically separates human excreta from human contact, resulting in sickness and death. Each year, 6 - 8 million people die from water-related diseases and natural disasters (WHO/ UNICEF, 2010).

As the world's population increases, scientists predict a 70% increase in food demand by 2050 (Bruinsma, 2009). But the fish populations in the oceans are dwindling and regional agricultural practices cannot keep pace. An estimated 85% of the world's population lives in the driest half of the planet, over half of which are in urban areas (WHO/ UNICEF, 2010). Those that live nearest the world's oceans or on island nations, like the Maldives, will suffer from rising sea levels as the polar ice and glaciers continue to melt, forcing them to emigrate to land with higher grounds, potentially destroying not only their homeland, but possibly their own unique cultures as well. Two thirds of the world's population lives within 40 miles of an ocean coastline (UN Atlas of the Oceans).

While we may not be able to totally mitigate the damage already done to the environment and the consequences that will impact future generations, not to try would indeed be a moral failing. *Mercy* would dictate that we try. Hopefully, science can point the way, and we will listen.

## **References**

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