

St. Francis himself lived this way by ever trying to **“follow in the footsteps of Jesus the Christ.”** Francis believed that to follow Jesus’ actions would ever lead him and his Franciscan brothers and sisters into a deeper awareness and consciousness of God’s plans and hopes for us. Franciscan spirituality, certainly informed by all we are, is at its center **a spirituality of the heart**, a spirituality of love. Both St. Francis and St. Clare encourage us to put our faith in action as a way to grow more deeply in an understanding of our faith and to grow in a deeper bond of love with God, our neighbors, and all of creation.

Difficult Readings Today

The readings today are difficult to preach about because they call us to **“stretch,”** to do more for our brothers and sisters, especially those in greater need than ourselves. As one preaching, I cannot tell you what to do or not do here. Most of our lives are already busy with many concerns. Today we often live with the challenge of finding a **“balance”** in our lives between busyness and a prayerful rhythm in our lives. But I also know in my own life that I often am inspired to do something more, and I sometimes put this off. I can also fall into a period of stagnation or a **“status quo”** kind of life. This is why the Scriptures today are a good reminder to look more deeply at our lives and at what God might be calling us to be about. **What really matters in life according to God, and is my life about this?**

I am reminded of a Jesuit model of action that encourages us to **“see-judge-act”** as a way to keep moving in the process of the transformation of the world. This model encourages us to **“see”** the many layers of a situation, then to discern or **“judge”** a good next step, and then to put this judgement into **“action.”** Then the process begins again after we have taken the earlier step of action. We evaluate how this action-step went, and what new step might we take now. The Jesuits use this in their social justice ministries as a way to keep going forward and make progress in helping to bring about a greater justice and peacefulness among people.

Spiritual Growth and the Next Life

The spiritual life is always about growth, change, and transformation. Even in the next life too. I am not too **“hep”** on playing a harp and sitting on a cloud for all eternity. We need new images of the next life. I believe we will continue to journey into the heart of God and into ever deeper relationships with our loved ones and new loved ones.

Is there someone you would really like to talk with in heaven? I would love to talk to John Duns Scotus, one of our insightful and beloved Franciscan philosopher-theologians. I do believe we will be able to do this in the next life: to keep growing and expanding our hearts.

This, I believe, is at the heart of life: that we **keep opening up our hearts more and more** the way God’s heart is open and expansive.

Being Present

We as creatures, and as sons and daughters of God, are able to grow with a deeper ability **“to be present”** to ourselves, to God, and to one another and all of creation. We grow in this capability to be present by deeply experiencing and understanding the depths and the mystery

of the “other” before us and of our beautiful and mysterious cosmos. This is to be **“salt and light”** for our world. We are the ones through whom the love of God flows for the transformation of the world and the true knitting together of the world in **kinship**.

An interesting insight I discovered this week as I worked with the Sunday readings was that the Jewish community added salt to their grain offerings to God. One of the properties of salt is that it is a preservative; and adding it to their offerings, the Jewish community was symbolizing their desire that the covenant with God would be preserved and would endure. Now hear Jesus’ words to us today anew when he calls us “salt.” We are the living reminders of God’s covenant with all of creation, and we remind others of God’s presence through our actions and our lives! We are called and invited to be the salt and light that the world needs to remember God and to remember our “true selves” before God.

Final Thoughts

All that we have been reflecting on this morning is gathered together and summarized in the Catholic community with the **“corporal and spiritual works of mercy.”** These have been brought together from the Scriptures that speak about them. These “works of mercy” are actions we can perform that “make real” the compassion and mercy of God for those in need.

To remind us, here are the **“corporal works of mercy”** ...

feed the hungry
shelter the homeless
clothe the naked
visit the sick and imprisoned
bury the dead
give alms to the poor.

And the **“spiritual works of mercy”** are acts of compassion that help our neighbors with their emotional and spiritual needs. Here we might see that we are already putting these works of mercy into action.

instruct
advise
console
comfort
forgive
bear wrongs patiently.

You can find these “works of mercy” at our chapel doors or on-line at:

<https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/scripture-and-tradition/catholic-basics/catholic-beliefs-and-practices/corporal-and-spiritual-works-of-mercy>

We can do these actions personally, but also at times we need to join together to be signs of the mercy of God together. We sometimes can have a greater impact on our societies and help empower and heal one another by joining together in these works of mercy.

Let us pray for one another and reach out to one another ... for ever greater courage and insight ... to step out in our faith for the good of our human family and all of creation. In this way we can **make real** the loving heart of our Good Lord and Brother: Jesus the Christ.

Fr. Henry B. Beck, OFM / St. Francis Retreat House, Easton, PA.