

The Fifth Work of Mercy: Visit the Sick



I was sick and you visited me (Matthew 25:36)

Of all the Works of Mercy, to visit the sick seems perhaps the most 'ordinary'. It takes a special effort to buy food for a foodbank, donate money to an overseas aid agency, clear out your unwanted clothes or become a prisoner visitor. When we take one of these actions it's easy to feel the satisfaction involved in feeding the hungry or clothing the naked. For this reason, it is the very ordinariness of the fifth work of mercy which challenges us. It is easy to overlook it, dismiss it or underestimate it; but this should not be the case.

Sickness is a fundamental part of life. It's inescapable in all its many forms, and sooner or later either we ourselves or someone we know or love falls sick. During Jesus's ministry here on earth sickness was a common theme and the Gospels are full of stories of cures and miracles, carried out by either Jesus or his disciples. The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has its foundation in James 5:14 "If one of you is ill, he should send for the elders of the church, and they must anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and pray over him".

Although, when we visit someone who is sick, we are not administering that sacrament to them, there is indeed a grace, a blessing, a sort of 'anointing' being conferred. If we view sacraments as encounters with God, then just by our simple presence with a sick person we are bringing the love of God to them. Consider the lengths which the friends of the paralytic (Mark 2: 1-12) went to in order to bring their sick friend to Jesus. Such was their faith that Jesus would bring healing, that they lowered the stretcher from the roof of a crowded room. We do not have the luxury of having Jesus

here on earth with us, so it falls to us to be his hands and feet, his eyes and mouthpiece. We cannot physically bring the sick to Jesus, but instead we can take Jesus to them. Like the friends of the paralytic, we too should have faith that the sick person will benefit from Jesus' love, manifested in our act of visiting. Just as the stretcher-bearers held their friend high and supported him on their shoulders, so too can our visits to the sick raise their spirit and continue to support them.

The blueprint of good living contained in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37) is a well-known example of who we should consider as our neighbour, and how we should treat our neighbour as we would want to be treated ourselves. Yet, it is easy to overlook the ordinary action at the end of this story: the Samaritan goes to visit the man he had helped. We are so taken up with the many things the Samaritan did to help the man, the many actions he took which manifested his compassion and mercy for him, that there is a tendency for the simplicity of his follow-up visit to be overshadowed. Our lives can be like this. We can be working so hard to bring God's mercy to others



through volunteering with various charities and good causes, that we can forget about the sick of our community and neglect to show them God's mercy through a visit. Similarly, when we ourselves are sick, we can be so preoccupied with fighting the illness that we neglect to allow ourselves to be still and to know God's mercy for ourselves.

How powerful a gift we all hold in our hands! We may not have the money to buy food for a foodbank, or donate to charity. We may not have regular hours of free time each week or the physical fitness needed to volunteer at an organisation. But we **all** have the gift within our capabilities to freely visit a sick person and in so doing manifest God's love and mercy to them. Compassion for them can be felt very easily, but mercy needs to be enacted.

A prayer

Through our lips let Christ speak.

Through our hands let Christ act.

Through our hearts let Christ love,

And through our sharing let Christ work. Amen.

Annabel Shilson-Thomas. *Live Simply: A CAFOD resource for living*

The following is a short list of ways in which we can 'visit the sick'. However, if you know of local initiatives and charities that others could get involved in, please send details to formation@nrcdt.org.uk and we will add them to this article.

British Red Cross currently need volunteers to help with shopping and or collecting prescriptions for sick people locally, to keep someone company in their home for a few hours and to take someone to appointments. If you feel you can help with this please open the link below which will take you to a registration form or call British Red Cross.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1wwiFdB3DPicpA4LxwuuGJ72DrWB6toP6itII2A1T8Hc/viewform>

Rainbows hospices for sick children and young people need help in a variety of roles in their hospices, being a willing hand to help out or simply just 'be' with the children. More information in the link below.

<https://www.rainbows.co.uk/get-involved/volunteer/>

Maggies centre for Cancer patients always needs volunteers to join their team of helpers in making tea, running activities etc. More information in the link below.

https://www.maggiescentres.org/media/uploads/maggies_volunteer_application_form.pdf

Organisations such as Age Concern and the Alzheimers Society run schemes where you can become a befriender to one of their service users.