OPERA MISERICORDIAE

# The Works of Mercy

Works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his bodily and spiritual necessities (CCC 2447). Seven serve the body and seven the soul — and on them, Our Lord tells us, we shall be judged.



*Caravaggio, The Seven Works of Mercy, 1607 · Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples*

### THE LAST JUDGMENT

*"For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me. … Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me."*

— Matthew 25:35–36, 40

### MERCY AS A DUTY

The works of mercy are not optional extras but the law of charity in action. Almsgiving is "one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity" and a work of justice pleasing to God (CCC 2447), and Tobit teaches that "alms deliver from death" (Tob 12:9). The spiritual works are the higher, since the soul is worth more than the body — yet both are owed, each according to our state and means.

## The Corporal Works *for the body*

1. **To feed the hungry**
   Sharing our bread with those who lack it. *Mt 25:35*
2. **To give drink to the thirsty**
   Even a cup of cold water given in His name has its reward. *Mt 10:42*
3. **To clothe the naked**
   Providing clothing and dignity to the poor. *Mt 25:36*
4. **To harbor the harborless**
   Welcoming the stranger, the homeless and the pilgrim. *Mt 25:35*
5. **To visit the sick**
   Comforting the ill, and bringing them the priest and the sacraments. *Mt 25:36*
6. **To visit the imprisoned**
   Also "to ransom the captive": caring for prisoners and the enslaved. *Mt 25:36*
7. **To bury the dead**
   Giving the dead a reverent Christian burial, as holy Tobit did. *Tob 1:20*

## The Spiritual Works *for the soul*

1. **To admonish the sinner**
   Correcting with charity, to win back a soul from error. *Jas 5:20*
2. **To instruct the ignorant**
   Teaching the truths of the faith, above all to children. *Dan 12:3*
3. **To counsel the doubtful**
   Giving sound advice to those uncertain how to act rightly. *Prov 12:15*
4. **To comfort the sorrowful**
   Consoling the grieving and afflicted with hope in God. *2 Cor 1:4*
5. **To bear wrongs patiently**
   Enduring injuries and annoyances without resentment. *Col 3:12–13*
6. **To forgive all injuries**
   Pardoning from the heart, as we hope to be forgiven. *Mt 6:14*
7. **To pray for the living and the dead**
   "A holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead." *2 Mac 12:46*