

# Corporal Work of Mercy

## To Bury the Dead

(Arkansas Catholic. "Seventh Corporal Work of Mercy: Bury the Dead." May 10, 2016.)  
excerpts from Daniel S. Mulhall from 10 May 2016.



St. Catherine of Siena, T.O.S.D.

### Catechism of the Catholic Church

*The dying should be given attention and care to help them live their last moments in dignity and peace. They will be helped by the prayer of their relatives, who must see to it that the sick receive at the proper time the sacraments that prepare them to meet the living God. The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit (CCC 2299-2300).*

### Sacred Scripture

*In the days of Salmeneser I performed many acts of charity to my kindred, those of my tribe. I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it. I also buried any whom King Sennacherib put to death when he came fleeing from Judea in those days of judgment that the king of heaven executed upon him because of his blasphemies. For in his anger he put to death many Israelites; but I would secretly remove the bodies and bury them. So when Sennacherib looked for them he could not find them (Tobit 1:16-18).*

**Of the seven corporal works of mercy**, only one is not found in Matthew 25:31-46: bury the dead. Why then is it included as one of the works of mercy?

**Proper burial of the dead** was an important practice in Israel from its earliest days. A common practice was to prepare the body for burial with ointments and spices, and then to wrap the body in a linen cloth before laying it in a tomb, as was done with Jesus (John 19:40).

**There the body would decay** until only bones remained, and then they would be moved to a permanent burial place where they would be placed with the bones of one's ancestors.

**Proper burial of the dead** was considered so important in Israel that being left unburied was considered a curse and a condemnation. Not to bury someone properly then was a sign of great disrespect and a condemnation. As with all of the works of mercy, what is emphasized here is the importance of compassion for others and the need to treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve as people created by a loving God.

**Showing love for others, even after death**, is how Jesus' disciples are to show their love for God.

*O Eternal God, receive the sacrifice of my life in this Mystical Body of Holy Church. I have nothing to give except what Thou has given me.*

# *Bury the Dead*

## *St. Catherine of Siena, T.O.S.D.*

### *Fast Facts:*

Born	• March 25, 1347
Feast Day	• April 29
Canonized	• June 29, 1461 by Pope Pius II
Quote	• "You are rewarded not according to your work or your time, but according to the measure of your love."



### *Her Life:*

- As the Black Death ravaged Siena in 1347, Catherine di Giacomo di Benincasa was born to virtuous and pious parents.
- As a child, Catherine was so joyful that her family gave her the nickname of "Euphrosyne," which is Greek for "joy" and the name of an early Christian saint.
- Catherine had her first vision of Christ when she was five or six: she was travelling home from a visit to her sister when she saw Christ seated in glory with his apostles. At that moment she vowed to give her whole life to God.
- At the age of sixteen, a vision of St. Dominic came to Catherine, but her family opposed her joining a religious order.
- After falling seriously ill, Catherine's family relented and allowed her to join the local order of Dominican tertiaries.
- Though Catherine joined the tertiaries, who were all of them widows, she was permitted to live at home.
- At the age of 21, in 1368, Catherine experienced what she described as a "Mystical Marriage" with Jesus.
- In 1374, a wave of the plague swept through Siena. Most people fled, but she stayed behind caring for victims and burying the dead.

- When the crisis ended, Catherine began to travel throughout Italy, advocating the reform of the clergy and advising people that repentance and renewal could be done through "the total love for God."
- In Pisa in 1375, Catherine received the stigmata, but it was visible only to herself.
- During this time she also wrote frequent letters, including letters to Pope Gregory XI, asking him to reform the clergy and move the papacy from Avignon to Rome.
- In 1376, she actually visited Pope Gregory XI in Avignon and chastised him, convincing him to return the Papacy to Rome the following year.
- In 1377, she returned to Siena, founding a woman's monastery of strict observance. She also wrote her *Dialogue* during this time.
- In 1378, after the Western Schism, Pope Urban VI summoned Catherine to Rome to serve in his court.
- Catherine died in Rome on 29 April 1380, having suffered a stroke.

### *How is St. Catherine a model for living out the Corporal Work of Mercy – To Bury the Dead?*

"Never did she appear more admirable than at this time," wrote a priest who had known her from girlhood. "She was always with the plague-stricken; she prepared them for death and buried them with her own hands. I myself witnessed the joy with which she nursed them and the wonderful efficacy of her words, which brought about many conversions."

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## *Practices to Foster growth in Burial of the Dead*

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- **Read a passage of Scripture that give examples of *Burial of the Dead*. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.**
  - Joshua 24:29-33
  - Sirach 7:33
  - Matthew 25:31-46
  - Luke 23:53
  - John 19:40
- **Catechetical Texts that speak to *Burial of the Dead*:**
  - “A farewell to the deceased is his final "commendation to God" by the Church. It is "the last farewell by which the Christian community greets one of its members before his body is brought to its tomb." The Byzantine tradition expresses this by the kiss of farewell to the deceased: By this final greeting "we sing for his departure from this life and separation from us, but also because there is a communion and a reunion. For even dead, we are not at all separated from one another, because we all run the same course and we will find one another again in the same place. We shall never be separated, for we live for Christ, and now we are united with Christ as we go toward him . . . we shall all be together in Christ" (CCC 1690).
  - By means of the funeral rites, it is has been the practice of the Church, as a tender mother, not simply to commend the dead to God, but also to raise high the hope of its children and to give witness to its own faith in the future resurrection of the baptized with Christ (from the decree promulgating funeral rites by the Congregation for Divine Worship, 1970).
- **Name some people from the Bible or saints who lived out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Bury the Dead*.**
  - Examples: (Tobit, St. Dismas, St. Sebastian, St. Joseph of Arimathea, St. Gregory the Great)
- **Ask the Lord how he is calling you to live out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Bury the Dead*.**