

Spiritual Work of Mercy To Comfort the Afflicted

(A Consideration of the Fourth Spiritual Work of Mercy, To Comfort the Sorrowful)
excerpts from Msgr. Charles Pope – May 19, 2015



St. Marianne Cope, OSF

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Law of the Gospel "fulfills," refines, surpasses, and leads the Old Law to its perfection. In the Beatitudes, the New Law fulfills the divine promises by elevating and orienting them toward the "kingdom of heaven." It is addressed to those open to accepting this new hope with faith - the poor, the humble, the afflicted, the pure of heart, those persecuted on account of Christ and so marks out the surprising ways of the Kingdom (CCC 1967).

Sacred Scripture

*For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.
– 2 Corinthians 4:17-18*

Of all the spiritual works of mercy, comforting the sorrowful requires the greatest patience, sensitivity, and also silence. This is because sorrow (or grief) often has a life and logic of its own; often it must be allowed to run its course. Sometimes there is not a lot a person can say or do when grief is present. Grief is something we can rarely get around; we must simply go through it. Thus, comforting or consoling the sorrowful and grieving people in our life often involves a kind of silent and understanding accompaniment more so than words or actions. To listen and give understanding attention often provides the greatest value.

St. Augustine once observed that sighs and tears in prayer often accomplish more than words. And so it is that when people are sorrowful, their grief and tears are their prayer and we do well to honor that, rather than to say, "Don't be sad" or "Cheer up." A largely silent and respectful silence can be a way of honoring grief and signaling a true camaraderie. St. Paul says, "Weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). Strange though it may seem, a dog often presents a good model, teaching us that when someone is having a bad day, the best thing to do is to just sit close by and nuzzle them gently.

The tender comforting of those who are sorrowful and grief-stricken, or the more vigorous sense of strengthening the afflicted, this is a work of mercy that is restorative of a brother or sister to the normal Christian state of being joyful, confident, and strong.

*"Creep down into the heart of Jesus.
He alone can comfort you in your supreme hour of sorrow."*

Comfort the Afflicted

St. Marianne Cope, OSF

Fast Facts:

Born	• January 23, 1838
Feast Day	• January 23
Canonized	• October 21, 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI
Quote	• "What little good we can do in this world to help and comfort the suffering, we wish to do it quietly and so far as possible unnoticed and unknown."

Her Life:

- Born in 1838 in Heppenheim, Grand Duchy of Hesse (present-day Germany).
- In 1839 she and her family emigrated to the United States, settling in Utica, NY.
- Marianne Cope attended the parish of St. Joseph, where she also attended the parish school.
- Marianne had to leave school to work in a textile factory to help support her family due to her father's illness.
- When her father died in 1862, Cope entered the novitiate of the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis in Syracuse, NY.
- By 1870, Cope helped found the first two Catholic hospitals in Central New York.
- In 1883, Cope received a plea from King Kalākaua of Hawaii to assist in their care for their leper colony. Despite King Kalākaua being turned down by more than 50 other religious congregations, she did not hesitate to accept the offer to help.
- She arrived later in 1883 to manage the Kaka'ako Branch hospital on O'ahu.



- In 1884, Cope set up the Malulani Hospital on Maui.
- In 1885, she founded the Kapiolani Home with the support of the Hawaiian government.
- In 1887, with a change in government, Cope was requested to establish a new home for patients on the Kalaupapa peninsula of Molokai.
- In 1888, Mother Cope cared for the dying Fr. Damien, who had leprosy.
- After years of helping the sick of Hawaii, Mother Cope died of natural causes in 1918.

How is St. Marianne Cope a model for living out the Spiritual Work of Mercy – To Comfort the Afflicted?

St. Marianne Cope did not hesitate to serve the sick and afflicted of Hawaii when she was asked. Though she desired to return to her order in New York, she always put the needs of the sick and afflicted before her own desires.

Practices to Foster growth in Comforting the Afflicted

- Read a passage of Scripture that give examples of *Comforting the Afflicted*. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.
 - Matthew 10:7-8
 - 2 Corinthians 12:9
 - 1 Peter 4:12-13
 - James 1: 12-18

- Catechetical Texts that speak to *Comforting the Afflicted*:
 - Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the "sin of the world," of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion (CCC 1505).

- Name some people from the Bible or saints who lived out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Comfort the Afflicted*.
 - Examples: (St. Peregrine, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Catherine of Siena, St. John Paul II)

- Ask the Lord how he is calling you to live out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Comfort the Afflicted?*