

## Counselor's Corner

### What's Behind the Door?

Have you ever watched a game show contestant eyeing a mystery door? The anticipation is almost tangible as hope centers around large sums of cash, a car, boat, or vacation. On December 8, in Saint Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis opened a special door, one that has been bricked up since 2000, the last time there was a Jubilee Year designated by a pope. Pass through this door, and there will be no material prizes. Instead, Pope Francis said, "anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope," because this is the "Year of Mercy". It is a year to receive, as well as give mercy. Although this beautiful bronze door is thousands of miles from Dearborn Heights, its message of forgiveness, reconciliation, and doing good tells us to open the doors of our hearts and become real live 21<sup>st</sup> century Samaritans.

Countless theologians and others have written about this event, but one article sent to me by a priest friend seems so practical. No author's name was provided, but both the title and subtitle grabbed my immediate attention. It is called, "56 Ways to Be Merciful during the Jubilee Year of Mercy: Practicing Mercy in Our Lives Actually Does Take Practice". Donating money and time is always great, but there are other things we can practice in our everyday lives.

For example, the author started out with a bang, addressing three of our bad habits: sarcasm ("the antithesis of mercy"), gossip ("the dark joy"), and half-hearted sharing (always taking the bigger half).

Since we do not totally own all the bad habits, the author says it would be helpful to learn the following prayer when dealing with difficult people. "Dear Lord, bless [insert annoying person's name] and have mercy on me." He also adds that we might benefit by being kind to someone who has wronged us or even make it a point to pray for him/her. When we are the ones who are annoying, the suggestion is to "admit that you [we] were a pain in the neck and ask the person to forgive you [us]."

To build better, loving relationships, where people feel valued, the author advises to put down the phone and make eye contact. It seems like eye contact, along with muting or turning off the TV, is another simple way to show we are listening. Another suggestion is "making it a point to smile, greet or make conversation with someone who is not in your everyday circle." Too often, we close off potential friendships and opportunities by sticking with the known. We can also be so focused on tasks that we do not see our coworkers or family members. Our preoccupation and closed mindedness lets merciful opportunities pass us by.

Many groups of people need our help, our mercy. The author mentioned that the grieving would be grateful to receive a card or note about 6 months after a death when many have left the mourner alone. When it comes to the homeless, a suggestion by Cardinal Timothy Dolan was included. The idea is to buy and carry \$5 fast food gift cards and give them to people in need.

These suggestions, along with the others that I did not mention, made me realize that being a Samaritan is not that difficult. All we have to do is open our eyes and hearts to the possibilities and not discount even the smallest opportunities to show mercy. The prize behind the door will be invaluable.

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