

Works of Mercy

Name: _____

Saint Damien of Molokai

Saint Damien of Molokai was a priest in the order of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He was sent as a missionary to the Hawaiian Islands in 1864. Shortly thereafter, leprosy spread to the islands and grew to be a tragic epidemic. Native residents of Hawaii who had contracted leprosy were sent to the island of Molokai to limit the spread of the disease. The residents of Molokai who were suffering from leprosy had been separated from their families, had very little medical care, and were given very few resources to care for themselves and each other.

Father Damien requested to be sent to Molokai in 1873 to minister to this community that felt discarded. Other missionaries had been to Molokai previously—they provided funding but would not interact closely with the residents for fear of contracting the disease. Father Damien decided that it was essential to restore the dignity of the people by reminding them of their inherent value, despite their illness and isolation. He built houses and encouraged the residents to gather for songs and dancing. More importantly, he interacted with the residents just as he would any other congregation. He anointed their heads with oil, talked with them, and worked alongside them. He distributed the Eucharist and called on the community to adhere to the natural law. Throughout his time of ministry, he knew that he could easily contract leprosy, but this fear did not stop him from being one with his flock. Father Damien was diagnosed with leprosy and died from the disease on April 15, 1889.

Father Damien's actions reminded the outcasts on the island of Molokai of their inherent dignity and worth. We are also called to serve those around us and work to uphold the dignity of all. The Church teaches about our calling to participate in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. These actions, drawn from Christ's direct teaching in Matthew 25:31–46, remind us that we are meant to care for one another and that we are responsible for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

For Discussion:

Review the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy in the tables below.

For each work of mercy, provide a specific example of a service someone your age could perform.

| Spiritual Works of Mercy | Example of Service |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Counsel the doubtful | _____ _____ |
| Instruct the ignorant | _____ _____ |
| Admonish the sinner | _____ _____ |
| Comfort the sorrowful | _____ _____ |

| | |
|---|-------|
| Forgive injuries | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Bear wrongs patiently | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Pray for the living and the dead | _____ |
| | _____ |

| Corporal Works of Mercy | Example of Service |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Feed the hungry | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Give drink to the thirsty | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Shelter the homeless | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Visit the sick | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Visit the prisoners | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Bury the dead | _____ |
| | _____ |
| Give alms to the poor | _____ |
| | _____ |

For Reflection:

- **Identify and describe a spiritual and a corporal work of mercy that Saint Damien practiced in Molokai.**

- **How do the spiritual and corporal works of mercy remind us of our connection to one another in Christ?**

- **Choose one work of mercy that you can perform this week.**

- **How will you perform this work of mercy?**

- **When will you perform this work of mercy?**

The Interior Castle

Name: _____

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The Interior Castle

In Saint Teresa of Avila's book "The Interior Castle," the soul is described as a castle with glass walls. At the center of the castle dwells God, who radiates light throughout the prisms of glass that make up the soul. As we grow in our relationship with God, we move toward the interior of the castle, closer to God and the source of all that is good.

Recall from a previous unit that the soul is the spiritual dimension of a person. Saint Teresa says, "the fact that the soul is made in God's image means that it is impossible for us to understand her sublime dignity and loveliness."¹ We are not able to fully grasp the beauty, value, and worth of ourselves, but we can see some of the blessings that God grants to us. God has given each of us particular talents and gifts, and he continues to be with us, providing an endless stream of spiritual gifts, such as courage, patience, and gentleness.

Dignity as a Gift from God

It is tempting to give ourselves all the credit for our own achievements, believing any success we have is the result of who we are and what we have done to create that success. Truthfully, our own talents and achievements are only possible because of God.

When we work so hard to achieve a high grade in a class, a starting position on an athletic team, the lead role in a musical, or a leadership role in a club, it is easy to cling to that achievement to *justify* our worth or value.

- "I am valuable in this play *because* I have the lead role."
- "I deserve to hang out with these kids *because* I'm the captain of the soccer team."
- "I deserve to be loved *because* I make good grades."

In reality, we have dignity simply because we are human, because we are creatures made in God's own image. We do not have to *earn* our basic dignity or value. While it is true that we can grow in additional dignity by becoming holier through virtuous acts and God's grace, we already are worth an immense amount.

How do we remain mindful of our immense, God-given dignity?

- Praise God for all the blessings he has given us.
- Remember the greatness of God that is reflected in us, his creation.
- Act in love, recognizing the greatness of God in others.

1. Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. Mirabai Starr (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), 36.

For Reflection:

- **Reflect on Saint Teresa's image of your soul as a great castle in which God dwells. What does it mean to you that God would choose to live within you?**

- **How does this change how you should act or speak?**

- **Use the template below to write a prayer, remembering the greatness and generosity of God.**

Dear Heavenly Father,

- **You are (Remember the greatness of God.)**

- **Thank you for (Praise God for all the blessings he has given you.)**

- **Please help me to (How do you need help acting in love today?)**

Amen.