

Day 186 – Tuesday, September 22 – Comfort the Afflicted

In the last few weeks I have been comforted by many people. The following may be appropriate:

The works of mercy are broken up into two categories: the corporal works of mercy and the spiritual works of mercy. The spiritual works of mercy are designed to meet the spiritual needs of others: Instruct The Ignorant, Counsel The Doubtful, Admonish The Sinner, Bear Wrongs Patiently, Forgive Offences Willingly, Comfort The Afflicted, Pray For The Living and The Dead.

Comfort The Afflicted

Everybody is going through something. When you walk into a room, how do you decide who you are going to talk to? Most of us immediately look for our best friends, other people we know, or those who seem the most like us. We often flock to the person who looks like they are having the most fun, who is the most attractive, or the most popular. We even tend to seek out people who could be the most advantageous to our professional life.

What if every time we entered a room we looked for the complete stranger or the person who seemed the most unlike us? What if we flocked to the person who seemed the saddest, most nervous, or most disengaged from the rest of the group? What if we sought out the person who seemed to be in the most pain?

Who did Jesus socialize with? The most marginalized people in society—the sick, the poor, the despised, and sinners. He interacted with the people we avoid, ignore, and mindlessly pass on the street. He spent time with them. He comforted them. He eased their pain. And he recognized each one of them as a child of God.

Affliction comes in many forms. Sometimes we can see the crosses people carry, but oftentimes it's the inner crosses that are the most agonizing. The truth is, everyone is going through something. Everyone is bearing a heavy load, a burden. When we are aware of that, we tend to be gentler, kinder, and more thoughtful towards others.

Every person we encounter—whether at a social gathering, the office, the gym, school, in line at the grocery store, or just walking down the street—is an opportunity to comfort the afflicted. It's an opportunity to show mercy—to validate that person and let them know that they matter and that their pain matters. And nothing makes us better comforters than having suffered ourselves. Could it be that God is calling you to reach out to someone who also lost a child, is struggling with their marriage, is stuck in an addiction, is out of work, is battling cancer? Having made it through the fight, you are proof that life can go on. You are hope. You are a living example of Jesus to others.

Imagine how different the world would be if we all slowed down enough to notice other peoples' pain; to offer uplifting smiles, encouraging words, and consolation; and to open our eyes to the invisible wounds. Let us all try to develop Joe's and Jesus' habit of going out of our way to engage and comfort the afflicted.

In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein