

Last night I received news that a friend of mine passed away...Deacon Brian McLane. For those of you who knew him you would know that when you looked “Christian” up in the dictionary there was picture of Brian. St. Francis de Sales is the patron saint of writers and journalists, I have a suspicion that, because Brian worked as a journalist all his life, St. Francis will have to make room in his office. I would ask that you pray for Brian and his family.

I was saving the following for November 1 or 2, All Saints or All Souls Day, but perhaps it is more timely today.

The works of mercy are broken up into two categories: the corporal works of mercy and the spiritual works of mercy. Sacred Scripture defines seven corporal works of mercy (Matt 25:31-46): Feed the hungry, Give drink to the thirsty, Clothe the naked, Shelter the homeless, Visit the sick, Visit the imprisoned, Bury the dead. The corporal works of mercy are concerned primarily with meeting the physical needs of others.

Bury The Dead

Most of us are not gravediggers or funeral directors, but many—if not all—of us have had the challenging, sometimes unpredictable, and emotionally draining job of burying the dead. If burying the dead is so agonizing, why do we do it?

WHEN WE BURY THE DEAD, WE HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE PASSED AWAY.

Every person was created in the image and likeness of God for a specific purpose. Whether the CEO of a major corporation, a stay-at-home mom, a pre-school teacher, or a drug addict, every human being matters and deserves to be treated with dignity, even in death. We can honor our loved ones and their legacies with wakes, funerals, and proper Christian burials—services where we share stories and reflect on the impact they had on each of us. These memorials also provide closure; the opportunity to say goodbye to a person’s physical presence in our lives. Another way to honor the deceased is to visit cemeteries and leave flowers at their gravesites.

WHEN WE BURY THE DEAD, WE PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE PASSED AWAY.

Every person is more than just a physical being—we are souls who await eternal life in heaven. And some of us have to wait longer than others. When we die, most of us don’t get a direct flight to heaven—we have a layover in purgatory. By praying for the souls of our deceased loved ones, we are shortening their stay in purgatory. Imagine meeting a family member, friend, or stranger in heaven and finding out that your prayers helped purify them for heaven. Wakes, funerals, and Christian burials provide the opportunity to begin praying for the dead. But we can—and should—continue offering prayers for our loved ones in the days, weeks, and years that follow. A great way is to go to Mass on the anniversary of your loved one’s death and offer up your Mass for their soul.

WHEN WE BURY THE DEAD, WE OFFER COMFORT AND SUPPORT TO THOSE WHO ARE GRIEVING.

Richard and Debbie drove eight hours to attend Allen’s father’s funeral. Richard and Debbie had never met Allen’s father, and they weren’t even close friends with Allen and his wife. But Richard and Debbie understood the importance of comforting and supporting people when loved ones die. You can console people by going to wakes and funerals, praying for people who are mourning the loss of a loved one, sending sympathy cards, offering to cook a meal, and letting people know you are thinking about them on the anniversary of a loved one’s death. People need to know they are not alone. Yes, burying the dead is challenging, sometimes unpredictable, and emotionally draining, but it’s an act of mercy acknowledging that people and their lives mattered—and still matter, even in death

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