

Catholic

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Stewardship

SEEING LAZARUS THE BEGGAR
IN THOSE WE ENCOUNTER

RANDY HAIN

"Consider the possibility that in today's society our problem is not that we don't see Lazarus. We see him, accept his plight, and either throw money at him or ignore him."

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As we grow in the Catholic faith, strive to be good stewards of God's blessings, and truly help those in need, many may find the call of stewardship a difficult and complex path to navigate. Donating money to good causes is very important, but actually lifting the burdens of the Lazaruses in our lives is even more essential.

Recall Jesus' parable in Luke 16:19–31: Lazarus—destitute and covered with sores—laid outside the door of a rich man's home and would have been content with the scraps from his table. But the rich man neglected to notice Lazarus until it was too late, bringing to mind Proverbs 21:13: "Those who shut their ears to the cry of the poor will themselves call out and not be answered."

Let's prayerfully consider how we can improve our basic interactions with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are struggling. Further, show how we can share beyond charitable giving: through love, prayer, witness, listening, or even a warm embrace. Likewise, let's expand our definition of Lazarus to include not only the countless poor, sick, homeless, and hungry of the world but also locally: the neighbor who is jobless, the coworker suffering from depression, the friend struggling financially, the family member who is sick, or the child with special needs who attends school with our own son or daughter. Lazarus is everywhere in our lives...if we have the courage to look for him.

Consider the possibility that our problem today is not that we fail to see Lazarus. We see him, accept his plight, and either throw money at him or ignore him. That may sound harsh, especially in light of statistics that show Americans are generous to those in need. The sums of money that flow from individuals and corporations to good causes are staggering. So what's the problem? Though many generously give their time, talent, and treasure to good causes and are truly a blessing, others hide behind walls where we address the problems of the world by merely dispensing money. Or worse, we do nothing.

Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 25:35–46:

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me." Christ asserts that helping the "least ones" is the same as helping him: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." For those who do nothing, he states: "Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels....Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me. And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

This Scripture is the source of the Catholic Church's teaching on the seven corporal works of mercy. And nowhere in Scripture do I see instructions to write a check or donate online. I recently took stock of my own stewardship and was surprised and disappointed to see that I mostly raise money for charities, write personal checks, and attend nonprofit board meetings. I spend less than a quarter of my time in front of those who need me. It seems I have allowed a wall to form around me that keeps me from interacting to make a difference. What's required is showing up and ministering to people in need. Using our expanded definition of Lazarus, we should realize that we're presented with many opportunities daily to help others, but we must own and act on our responsibility. We must strive to act more and reach out.

DIG DEEPER

How can we meet our call to help our brothers and sisters in Christ?

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Do we embrace or avoid the vulnerability we feel in defining a problem and seeking a solution?

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Are we impeded by a fear that people will want more than we can or want to give?