

Mercy at Work at Work

“Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.” How often I have uttered or prayed those words without really realizing that I was asking for more than forgiveness. What I was really doing was acknowledging I had sinned and deserved punishment and I was asking Him to go beyond justice, not only to forgive me but to restore me to full friendship with Him. Asking for mercy was asking that he meet my needs beyond any measure that justice required or allowed, beyond any merit that the rest of my life might deserve. This could only come out of His love for me, however undeserved that love was.

As a recipient of mercy, how do I pass it on, pay it forward? It begins with love. With God’s grace, my love of and respect for others as fellow humans must grow strong enough to overcome my ego’s reluctance to serve others beyond what they deserve or what they can do for me. I must see the needs of others, feel compassion for them, and take action to meet those needs. Sometimes it calls me to start with forgiveness; other times forgiveness is not part of the equation. There is just a need that I can relieve, if I so choose.

To be merciful, we need to look beyond trite surface of our daily encounters. We have to see the one who needs attention but is not getting it. It could be a co-worker, a student, a customer, even a supervisor. Mercy could be in the words or the tone we use, particularly in response to a perceived slight—gentle and open or harsh and off-putting. Mercy could be in giving help beyond what is required or deserved so that another can succeed. Mercy could be maintaining a friendship when a friend has inflicted harm severe enough to justify ending the friendship. You could just forgive and move on or you could choose to forgive and to retain the friendship because friendship with you fulfills a need for this person. That is mercy.

When you have authority over someone who has broken rules and deserves punishment or disciplinary action, mercy would be keeping the discipline in line with the problem. It is not discipline out of revenge but out of concern for the growth and learning of the person.

As human beings, we are able to grow in mercy. We can engage with others to recognize needs that we, in mercy, can meet. I think it begins with an examination of our own situations, recognizing and being grateful for the gifts and mercy we have received. Then we can volunteer to help others in need through parish and mercy organizations like St. Vincent de Paul chapters, food pantries, hot meal programs, Habitat for Humanity, and tutoring programs at local schools. We can donate money to these same programs and to Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services, free clinics, and other local and inter-national non-profits serving the needy.

A key to growth in mercy seems to be to meet and talk with those being served. In that interaction respect grows, love grows, compassion grows, and mercy grows.

Mercy — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of mercy in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of mercy in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How could you apply the concept of mercy in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the advice of Paul in Colossians? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?