

Turning to God in Times of Tragedy

by James P. Campbell, D.Min.

Times of disaster or great sadness are trying for us all. Yet these times present opportunities to teach your children lasting spiritual lessons and the importance of trusting God.

Faith Themes

Jesus calls us to eternal life with our Father in heaven.

The church recognizes corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Natural Teachable Moments

- After the sudden death of a friend or family member
- When a natural disaster strikes a community or another country, leaving pain, destruction, famine, disease, orphans, or homelessness
- When political oppression, social injustice, or genocide create a refugee crisis

In the days after September 11, 2001, churches, synagogues, and mosques were filled with people. Around the world candles were lit. Impromptu shrines were filled with flowers and prayer intentions. Prayers were offered for the dead and their suffering families. In tragic times our children naturally have questions about God and heaven. Treat their questions with respect. Be patient, knowing that you do not have all the answers. Pray with your children for all those caught up in tragedy.

Starting the Conversation

Think of concrete ways that you as a family can be a source of help and comfort for those who suffer, especially those faced with tragic situations.

To Help You Connect

One practical and easy first step after a tragedy has struck a community, group, or country—the earthquake in Haiti, the floods in New Orleans, the famines in Africa, or the tsunami in Asia—is to check the website of organizations such as Catholic Charities, the Campaign for Human Development, Red Cross, Amnesty International, Jesuit Refugee Service, and Catholic Relief Services. Or perhaps you can get on their mailing list beforehand. These organizations often distribute information about various ways people can immediately help after a disaster, such as donations of urgently needed goods and services. Also, check with your local parish to see what it might be organizing. Then help your child to appreciate the many good things that people of faith are doing in the world and to see how she might become part of this effort.

To Support You

Suggested Bible Reading

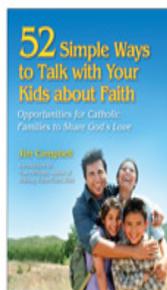
Jesus' parable of the Last Judgment tells us that we will be judged according to our faith and how we treat others:

Matthew 25:31–46

What the Church Says about This Topic

In Catholic Church teaching, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are actions we can perform that extend God's mercy and compassion to those in need. In order to better understand this, it is helpful to clarify what we mean by God's mercy. At Mass, during the penitential act, we pray, "Lord, have mercy!" Sometimes, when we think of the word mercy, we picture someone throwing himself on his knees before a cruel villain, pleading to be spared some punishment. This is not our understanding of God's mercy. We do not ask for God's mercy because we are afraid of incurring God's wrath as punishment for our sins. Rather, when we call on God to have mercy, we are calling on God in the only way we know him—as one who responds with infinite compassion to those in need. When we show mercy to others, we are responding as God responds: with compassion. Works of mercy are opportunities to extend God's compassion to those in need.

There are two kinds of works of mercy: corporal and spiritual. Corporal works of mercy are the kind of acts by which we help our neighbors with their everyday material and physical needs. These include things like feeding the hungry, finding a home for the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison, giving alms to the poor, and burying the dead. Spiritual works of mercy are the kind of acts through which we help our neighbors meet the needs that are emotional and spiritual, including instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving, and bearing wrongs with patience.



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