

6. January 2026
EPISTLE OF JAMES
“Faith and works”

James 2:14–26

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”; and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

The apostle James speaks bluntly. He makes it clear to us that faith must be accompanied by works that derive from it in order to be authentic and fully lived. Thus, he puts us in front of a mirror so that we may question ourselves as to whether we truly put our faith into practice and make it visible through works of mercy.

In this context, it is worth recalling what the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are, as taught by our Catholic tradition:

Corporal works of mercy:

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Visit the prisoner
- Shelter the homeless

- Visit the sick
- Bury the dead

Spiritual works of mercy:

- Admonish the sinner
- Instruct the ignorant
- Counsel the doubtful
- Comfort the sorrowful
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive all injuries
- Pray for the living and the dead

In general, it can be said that the corporal works of mercy, which Sacred Scripture—particularly the New Testament—strongly exhorts us to perform, are accepted by a large part of society and have permeated many areas of human life. In general, they are recognized in our Western civilization. However, it is questionable whether they are motivated by love for God and observance of His commandments and, therefore, whether they glorify the author and initiator of these works. We can also find corporal works of mercy in humanitarian associations and political programs, where they are recognized and practiced—or at least aspire to be—but independently of God.

The same is not true of the spiritual works of mercy. Some of them are directly connected to God and, therefore, do not enjoy the prestige they actually deserve in human society. Faith is a prerequisite for understanding their value. Consider, for example, the work of admonishing the sinner or praying to God for the living and the dead. These are acts that presuppose faith.

As Catholics, we can conclude the following from the words of the Apostle James: the deeper our faith, the more it will urge us to practice works of mercy, which will thus become a sign of its authenticity. Our Lord did the same during His earthly life: He proclaimed the true faith and performed works that, on the one hand, accredited the mission entrusted to Him by the Heavenly Father and, on the other, testified to God's mercy and loving omnipotence toward men. In a world increasingly distant from God, we must bear witness to this indissoluble bond.

If the apostle James so insistently points out to us the relationship between faith and

works—to the point of affirming that faith must cooperate with works and that faith reaches its perfection through them—we should bear witness with our lives that the good works we do are the fruit of faith. If faith reaches its perfection through works, we can also say that works reach their perfection through faith, since every good gift comes from God and He deserves all the glory. Let us remember that the works Jesus performed awakened faith in God among the people.

If we take works of mercy seriously, we must bear in mind that one of them exhorts us to admonish the sinner—something that is unfortunately practiced less and less today, even in the Church. In other times, this was something natural. The prophets pointed the kings to the right path, and good popes and bishops always had the courage to publicly witness to the Gospel and to correct those who strayed from it. And today? Everyone can reflect for themselves and see that this work of mercy, which is so important, is hardly practiced. This is related to the fact that people no longer have the same awareness of the seriousness of sin and often do not point it out as such.

And what are the consequences? There is confusion and a lack of the clarity that our faith should offer to the world. The practice of works of mercy, together with the witness that they come from God, can help people to experience the goodness of the Lord and accept His invitation to let themselves be loved by Him and to respond to His love.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2024/01/06/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/9476-2/>