

Pope's Lenten message has acts of mercy at its heart

Live your faith during Lent by performing charity works - Francis

Cindy Wooden

Lent is a time of conversion and a time to deepen one's faith, demonstrating and sharing it through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, Pope Francis said.

"Faith finds expression in concrete everyday actions meant to help our neighbors in body and spirit," the pope said in his message for Lent, which begins on 10th February for Latin-rite Catholics.

Feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, welcoming strangers, offering instruction, giving comfort – "on such things will we be judged," the pope said.

Particularly during the Year of Mercy, he said, Catholics are called to recognise their own need for God's mercy, the greatness of God's love seen in the death and resurrection of Christ and the obligation to assist others by communicating God's love and mercy through words and deeds.

"The root of all sin is thinking that one is god, something often expressed in a total preoccupation for accumulating money and power," the pope wrote. And just as individuals can be tempted to think they have no need of God, social and political systems can run the same risk, ignoring both God and the real needs of human beings.

"Love alone is the answer to that yearning for infinite happiness," Pope Francis wrote. It is the only response to the loneliness

and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited," he wrote. "In the spiritual works of mercy – counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer – we touch more directly our own sinfulness."

In the Christian life, Pope Francis said, "the corporal and spiritual works of mercy must never be separated."

Cardinal Francesco Montenegro, president of Caritas Italy and head of the archdiocese that includes the Italian island of Lampedusa, told reporters at a Vatican news conference that the pope's message, like the Bible, "does not stop simply at reaffirming that God is merciful, but clearly indicates that his children must be merciful, too, by living a greater love, especially by taking care of the little ones, the poor and defenceless."

The cardinal said that from his own experience as archbishop of Agrigento, he has seen how people's faith and joy have grown and become contagious when they not only go to Mass, but also volunteer to assist the thousands of migrants who land on Lampedusa's shore seeking safety and a better life for their families.

Mgr. Giampietro Dal Toso, secretary of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the office that promotes and co-ordinates Catholic charity, told reporters that Pope Francis wants to help Catholics rediscover the traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which seemed to have been left on the shelf with dusty old books. Maybe, he said, "it was no longer fashionable" to preach about the daily actions of believers or maybe "our ecclesial



Iain Duncan Smith with staff and residents of Caritas Anchor House

Secretary of State praise for Catholic homeless charity

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith MP, has praised Newham homeless charity Caritas Anchor House for its transformative work and comprehensive approach to tackling homelessness during a visit.

Duncan Smith met with residents of Caritas Anchor House, which offers a home and support to over 230 homeless people each year in Newham, East London. The residents shared their experiences of homelessness and how Caritas Anchor House was supporting them to rebuild their lives.

Resident Debbie Brown, aged 46, told Mr Duncan Smith that before she came

to Caritas Anchor House she had been sofa surfing and hadn't been employed for 20 years.

However, since taking part in volunteering work through the charity, she has improved her skills and confidence and has recently secured a job.

"It was great meeting Iain Duncan Smith – I got to tell him about how Caritas Anchor House has supported me and so many others," said Ms Brown. "He was really understanding and interested in what we all had to say."

Mr Duncan Smith said, "It's clear that Caritas Anchor House changes the lives of the people that live here. They resta-

bilise each resident and give them the beginning of the start of a new life.

"Caritas Anchor House is more comprehensive than other homeless charities I have seen. They offer more than just a stable base – they address the reasons why they are there. Caritas Anchor House is intent on positively changing lives, not just sustaining them as they are."

Keith Fernett, chief executive of Caritas Anchor House, said: "We were delighted to have the opportunity to show the secretary of state how Caritas Anchor House transforms the lives of the people who live here, supporting them into employment and to become members of society."