

What is mercy?

“It’s nothing more than charging your heart with a bit of other people’s misery.” (St. Augustine)

This Sunday marks the end of the Liturgical year with the [Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe](#), and as very often we do at the end of something, we take stock of what happened, what was good and what we could have done better. This past year was not an easy one for all of us. After the fear of COVID seems to be under better control, we are living through wars, polarization, hate, and climate catastrophes to name just a few. Yes, indeed the world is in crisis.



The Gospel of Matthew offers us the last speech of Jesus before his entry into his passion. Even in life, when we find ourselves at the end of an experience, a relationship or a life, we try to say what is most important. For this reason, the words that Jesus pronounces in this speech have a particularly important value.

The last words of Jesus as teacher to his disciples paradoxically concern simple gestures, the gestures of everyday life. As if Jesus wanted to say that what matters to him is how we lived the ordinariness of our lives. Not if we have done extraordinary things, but if we have loved in the most banal things that life asks of us. So in this time of so much evil and dismay, the most important question is this: how much love are we putting into the obvious things of life? The obvious things are those that the heart cannot fail to see. Simple gestures are what are really needed right now. Tradition has indicated these gestures that Jesus presents in the gospel are the Corporal Works of Mercy.

In the end, therefore, we realize that sometimes our eyes are closed to what reality was asking of us. Times of crisis purify our gaze and can help us understand what really matters, what is worth spending our lives on.

Yet the way in which Jesus talks about these gestures and invites us to carry them out does not have a purely philanthropic value; here it is not only about being women and men who recognize the dignity of others. There is another step that Jesus invites us to take and which is the very foundation of recognizing the dignity of others: identifying ourselves with the least. Going to look for the one who is most in need means going to look for Jesus. Finding those who need me in this moment means finding God. These gestures have a profoundly theological value; they are faith lived.

God allows himself to be found in smallness and it is beautiful to reaffirm him precisely in the solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, because contemplating this smallness helps us to purify all our ideas of affirmation, power, glory, and success. In a culture of primacy, visibility and

competition, contemplating the figure of the true humble and poor King is the most adequate healing for our sick ideas of power.

True mercy is the unconscious one, the one that becomes a way of life, the one that does not make proclamations or Facebook live broadcasts. In this Sunday's gospel passage those who performed acts of mercy did not even notice it. For them it was normal, nothing extraordinary. The worrying thing, however, is that one can have a hard heart without even realizing it; those who did not perform acts of mercy in the parable did not realize it. They lived in indifference without even perceiving that there was something out of place in their lives: "Lord, when did we see you...and not minister to your needs?" They did not see because they were withdrawn into themselves.

The best way to celebrate the King is to imitate Him. Christ not only makes himself found in the smallest but is the one who has fully experienced attention to the needs of the littlest ones. He is one who welcomes, visits, and takes care. And never more than in this time do we need to live like this, as Christians!

Sr. Maria Orlandini, OSF
Director of Advocacy

Suggested Action:

Proclaim with no fear that Jesus is the King of the Universe, especially in situations in which justice is not respected and people in poverty are ignored.
Find ways to get involved with others, in working for ending discrimination and violence. Why not try joining a [Franciscan Justice Circle](#)?

Suggested Petitions:

For Christians everywhere, that the values proclaimed by imitating Christ the King may give new energy for creating more just and equitable societies.
That in living the Corporal Works of Mercy we may contribute to peace in our violent societies.

Prayer from St. John XXIII

**Lord Jesus Christ,
the King of the Universe,
the Prince of Peace,
make all men and women witnesses of truth,
justice, and neighborly love.
Banish from their hearts
whatever might endanger peace.
Enlighten our leaders that they may guarantee
and defend the great gift of peace.
May all peoples of the earth
become as brothers and sisters.
May longed-for peace blossom forth
and reign always over us all.**

Amen

Donate to FAN on Giving Tuesday November 28

This year, your contributions to Franciscan Action Network were instrumental in helping FAN to be an effective Franciscan voice in Washington D.C. in support of peace, justice, care for creation, poverty alleviation, and human rights.



As followers of Jesus in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, we Franciscan-hearted people have a special responsibility to speak for peace, including when it is difficult to do so. This year, FAN has provided more than 12,000 people from across the United States with the opportunity to learn about and critically reflect on many key social justice issues. Those include the plight of the migrants and refugees, climate change, racial and environmental justice, the war waged against Ukraine and, most recently, the horrific violence and loss of life in Gaza and Israel. FAN needs your support now to be able to continue this work in 2024.

Watch this [brief video appeal](#) from Br. Jacek Orzechowski OFM,, a former board member and self-proclaimed “enthusiastic” supporter of FAN! Please [consider a gift on or before Giving Tuesday](#).

Watch Candlelight Prayer Vigil for Peace in Gaza

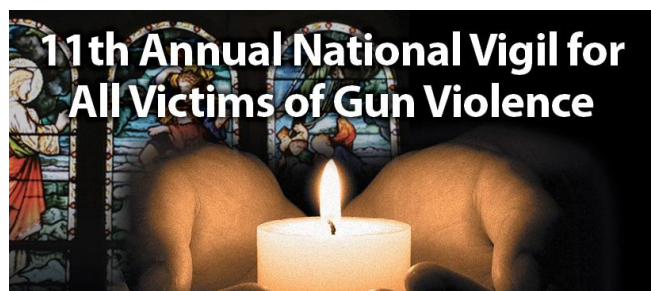
Franciscan Action Network (FAN) cosponsored a candlelight prayer vigil in front of the White House on Monday, Nov. 20 in Washington, D.C. FAN Executive Director Michele Dunne joined a notable list of national Christian leaders in calling for a ceasefire and an end to all violence between Israel and Hamas.

All of the speakers and coordinating organizations agreed in their calls for a bilateral ceasefire, immediate and adequate humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and the release of hostages. The event was live streamed on [Churches for Middle East Peace YouTube page](#).



National Vigil for Victims of Gun Violence

FAN will cosponsor the 11th Annual National Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence at St Mark's Episcopal Church on Capitol Hill on **Wednesday December 6, 2023 from 7:00 - 9:00 PM ET**. This annual event hosted by a dedicated gun violence prevention coalition brings together hundreds of gun violence



survivors from 28+ states to honor all victims of gun violence.

Local vigils/events are being planned by groups working together with survivors and advocates in many communities. Please register your event on the Newtown Action Alliance Foundation website [here](#). We encourage you to consider hosting a local vigil. This [toolkit](#) from Newtown Action Alliance will help you plan.

Take action by signing your organization or community onto the [Sandy Hook Anniversary Letter](#) to all Members of Congress urging action on a number of lifesaving bills including universal background checks, Ethan's Law, and the Assault Weapons Ban of 2023.

Signatures are due by Thursday, November 30. Read more about the bills and sign on the letter by [clicking here](#).

Monthly Anti-Trafficking Prayer Service

Recently, the USCCB created a special working group dedicated to Anti-Trafficking Education and Outreach. They will host a new monthly prayer service on the 8th of each month, the date of St. Josephine Bakhita's Feast Day in February. The mission is to bring awareness each month of the year to issues that intersect with human trafficking.

The next prayer service is **December 8 at 2pm ET (11am PT) on Zoom** when the prayer service will focus on experiences of migrants, refugees and asylees. Join the monthly prayer services at this recurring [St. Josephine Bakhita Prayer Service Zoom Link](#).

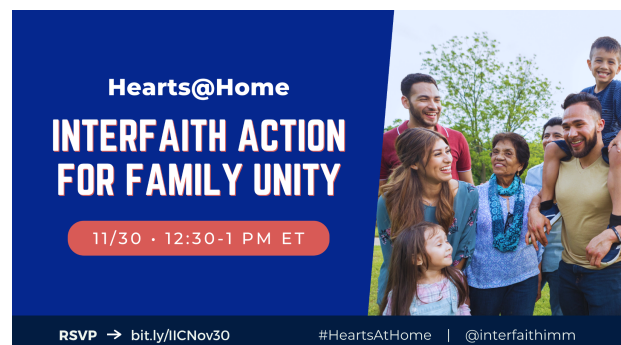
Additionally, the group has produced two resources: A [St. Josephine Prayer Card](#) and an [Anti-Trafficking Calendar for 2024](#).



Take Action: Interfaith Action for Family Unity

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition has planned a brief lunchtime gathering on **Thursday, Nov. 30 from 12:30p-1pm ET (9:30a-10a PT)** as an opportunity for people of faith to come together and take action in solidarity with families who remain separated or face the risk of separation due to the outdated U.S. immigration system.

Together, participants will make calls to the Biden administration to urge them to reunite and protect families by (1) recapturing unused green cards, (2) providing parole for people in family backlogs, and (3) expanding family reunification parole to all countries. [RSVP here](#) and please spread the word in your network. If you can't make it on 11/30, you can still take action by [signing this petition](#).



Related to this, it was reported last week that the Afghanistan Adjustment Act (AAA) was included in the Continuing Resolution through a [bipartisan effort](#) in the Senate. We will continue to monitor any news on AAA in hopes of seeing provisions for permanent residency established in the U.S. for refugees from Afghanistan. [Take action](#) to urge your members of Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act.

The positive impact of migrants/immigrants is greatly underappreciated. The American Immigration Council just released the [2023 Map the Impact report](#), an interactive data-map showcasing the contributions of immigrants in the country, all 50 states, and industry sectors across the economy. Make use of this map to educate yourself and others about the immeasurable benefits from a diverse group upon culture, food, and the arts.

Franciscan Justice Circles Updates

A multi-faith and multi-sector “Sweet Truth coalition” recently celebrated the signing of the Sweet Truth Bill by Mayor Adams. The coalition, which enjoyed a vigorous Franciscan presence, including many NYC-Area Franciscan Justice Circle members, worked diligently to mobilize support for the bill and raise awareness about the inequitable health impacts of added sugars in the diets of New Yorkers.



The Sweet Truth Bill is designed to empower New Yorkers to make informed decisions about food and drink choices, fostering a more transparent food environment. Watch the [press conference and bill signing here](#).

This is a great example of the coordinated advocacy work being done by Franciscan Justice Circles all over the country. If you would like to learn more about joining or starting an FJC in your area, please [contact us](#).