

Be God's Hands and Heart



 Christopher News Notes

OUR HANDS CAN DO SOME INCREDIBLE THINGS. For nurses, hands are a lifeline that bring care to patients. Mothers use their hands to show love to their children, scooping them into their arms or rubbing their backs. Gardeners use their hands to bury or sow seeds that grow colorful plants. Our hands allow us to carry out the love we feel in our hearts. Most importantly, they help us live out the mission that we are called to every day: to be God's hands and heart to others.

Jesus addresses this theme in Matthew 25:35-40. Speaking to a crowd, He says, "For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me."

When the crowd asks when they helped the Lord in these ways, Jesus replies: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me."

Whenever we dedicate our time to helping others, we are being God's hands and heart. It's no coincidence that we as humans are born with an innate drive to care for others, and even in small moments, our stepping up to help one another can trigger a ripple effect felt by many.

Dominican Sister Offers Consolation

"No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another."
—Charles Dickens

Dominican Sister Marie Anna Stelmach from Sinsinawa Mound in Wisconsin has donned many hats over her 58 years as a nun: from teaching school children, to serving as a chaplain for prisoners, to being a nurse and caregiver to her fellow Sisters. In the winter of 2019, Sister Marie Anna started on her next path in helping others: serving as a volunteer for the Mayo Clinic hospital system.

The Mayo Clinic is a non-profit organization, which was founded partly by the Sisters of St. Francis. It has five major campuses around the country, including one in Rochester, Minnesota, where Sister Marie Anna served on a temporary mission assignment through spring 2021. She had heard about the facility from a few Sisters who received care there.

"People here are hurting physically, emotionally, spiritually," she told the Mayo Clinic website. "I ask God to be God's hands and heart when I am with a patient. What I really want to give to patients is my presence."

God Works Through Frail People

Let's face it, helping others can sometimes feel like a burden. It's easy to care for people we love, but what about the people we dislike? It's difficult to garner sympathy for co-workers who drive us up a wall or perhaps a classmate who gets under our skin. Why then does God choose us to help? Why are we called to be the hands and heart of God?

Author Julie Davis talks about this in her book, *Thus Sayeth the Lord*. In a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she explained, "God does His greatest work through frail people. He helps us become the people we are meant to be...It starts with Adam. We were meant to be helpers all along. When Adam is first created, God says, 'Help till the land. Help this garden become greater.' So that was always our destiny. Then personally, for each of us, we're helping not because [God] needs us. He doesn't need anything. But we need it. It's both fulfilling and creatively satisfying when you're doing what you're created to do. And not as a puppet, but with full cooperation and thought. Also, as we try and fail and try again, that's how we learn."

During some shifts, Sister Marie Anna offered hand massages in the waiting areas of the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory and Thoracic Surgery floor. During one session, she recalled a patient telling her, "You just massaged all the anxiety out of me." At other times, she helped patients get checked in—or comforted family members about loved ones in the hospital.

Every day that she volunteered, no matter what role she played, Sister Marie Anna said she aimed to "render consolation" to anyone in need. "I know when I go back [to my community], I'll be a better nurse, better caregiver, better community member," she said. "With volunteering, of course, you receive far more than you ever imagined and far more than you ever give...There are so many God moments here. It is a reminder that God is everywhere and at all times."

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."
—Acts 20:35

Twins Serve God and His Creation

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."
—Matthew 5:16

Brendan and Patrick McNaughton are no strangers to yard work. The 16-year-old twins remember

mowing their parent's lawn and trimming hedges as part of their chores growing up. Now, they're using their skills to help others. In 2020, the brothers started Zero Carbon Lawn Care, a business dedicated to cleaning and beautifying yards with no guilt over the environmental impact.

Both students at La Salle Institute, a Catholic high school in Albany, New York, the McNaughtons cited their school's emphasis on volunteering and helping their community as inspiration for their business. Their father, Tom, explained, "They were studying environmental science—and in religion class, they were discussing 'community good.' We tried to tie the whole thing together, successfully I believe."

The twins use regular push mowers, hand shears, and brooms. In other words, nothing that would account for carbon emissions or gas consumption. None of their equipment is battery powered; it all runs on elbow grease and a lot of muscle.

In an interview with Emily Benson of *The Evangelist*, newspaper of the Diocese of Albany, Brendan said, "It's a way to help others because they don't have to do [their lawn] on their own, and most people use gas mowers. We're kind of doing our part and their part."

Since launching their business, Zero Carbon Lawn

Care has expanded its rolodex of clients, all of whom have praised the brothers' attention to detail—and their kindness. Sister Rosemary J. Sgroi, RSM, is one of the brothers' loyal customers. In 1994—with approval from her religious order, the Sisters of Mercy—she moved into the Albany home that had belonged to her parents. For years, she cared for her own yard. But that became more difficult with age. On the advice of a friend, she called the McNaughtons and was pleased to discover they did an excellent job.

The brothers insist on caring for Sister Rosemary's yard free of charge, but admit that they'll happily accept the cookies and candies she offers in exchange. "I want people to know how respectful they are," she said. "They come over every single week, and they are so faithful. I'm just grateful I don't have to lug that heavy mower around!"

The French Dorothy Day

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."
—John 15:12

Have you heard of the "French Dorothy Day"? Madeleine Delbrêl (1904-1964) was a talented poet and empathetic friend to all she encountered. She wrote beautiful books on the Catholic faith and performed critical social justice work in France, coordinating social programs for the government during World War II.

In 2018, she was deemed "Venerable" by the Catholic Church, the step before beatification

and then sainthood. But early in life, Delbrêl was an atheist.

During the 1920s, she wrote popular atheist manifestos, attended magnificent parties with friends, and drank and danced through her teenage years in a rambunctious blur. Then, at age 20, everything changed. Her fiancé ended their relationship, and her parents split up. Her troubles led Delbrêl to ponder the existence of God. If it was possible that He was real, she figured she ought to start praying. Delbrêl once said, "By reading and reflecting, I found God; but by praying, I believed that God found me and that He is living reality, and that we can love Him in the same way we love a person."

Delbrêl abandoned her atheism and converted to the Catholic faith. Through her writing, she reached thousands. She pioneered the idea that Catholics could love communists while rejecting their ideology. And in her most popular book, *We, the Ordinary People of the Streets*, Delbrêl discussed how lay people could be missionaries in everyday life.

In a passage taken from her book, she wrote: "God is everywhere—and how many souls even take notice?...Lord, Lord...My eyes, my hands, my mouth are Yours. This sad lady in front of me: here is my mouth for You to smile at her. This child so pale he's almost gray: here are my eyes for You to gaze at him. This man so tired, so weary: here is my body so that You may give him my seat, here is my voice so that You may say softly to him, 'Please sit down.' This smug young man, so dull, so hard: here is my heart, that You may love him, more strongly than he has ever been loved before."

Delbrêl showed us that we can all take the opportunity to serve as God's hands and heart. As she wrote, "This street, this world...is our place of holiness...Each tiny act is an extraordinary event in which heaven is given to us, in which we are able to give heaven to others."


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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*"Give your hands to serve and your hearts
to love."*
—St. Teresa of Calcutta