

Fr. Perozich comments —

To begin the conversation in spiritual direction I ask the directee 4 questions which David Bonagura answers in the article below:

1. *Who has God brought into your life since our last meeting?*
2. *What situations has He allowed you to encounter?*
3. *How did you let Him work through you?*
4. *How did you stand in His way?*

The Two Forms of Christian Service

[David G Bonagura, Jr.](#)

Christianity is a religion of paradoxes. One is the strange relationship between the natural world that we see and the supernatural world that we do not. The latter is where God resides and is our ultimate home. At the same time, it is ever-present to us: **it sustains and penetrates the natural order while enveloping us in multiple ways.**

God is present in us through sacramental grace and before us in the Eucharist. He is also present in a different way in other people whom we encounter, an astonishing fact Jesus taught plainly: charitable acts transcend both worlds. “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:41)

Serving others is as essential to Christian practice as Sunday worship, prayer, and keeping the commandments, and ways to serve are abundant. Rightfully, Catholic schools and religious education programs compel their students to perform charitable works in the hope that they will learn to cultivate a habit of serving.

In Book X of *The City of God*, St. Augustine reminds us of another form of service. “If a man loves himself, his one wish is to

achieve blessedness, which is to be near God. Thus, if a man knows how to love himself, the commandment **to love his neighbor bids him to do all he can to bring his neighbor to love God.** This is the worship of God; this is true religion; this is the right kind of devotion; this is the service which is owed to God alone.”

If **the greatest act of charity is to give God to another person**, why don't we regularly encourage this form of giving? Perhaps because it is easier to give money or material things. Perhaps because our view of service suffers from a false dichotomy imagined between worship and charity. Perhaps because deep down we don't believe that God is the ultimate good for our lives.

This is not to say that we should cease material giving, which is necessary for all Catholics. Charity, like all things, is best understood in context. **Catholic material charity in any form is not designed to be given alone; it is given along with the Gospel.**

Franciscans, for example, do not give food to the poor and then send them away. They **sit with recipients and befriend them with the intention of inviting them to know God.** Material charity serves as the channel to God, who is charity – that is, love itself.

Hence, as an aside, attacks by states and the federal government against the Little Sisters of the Poor and other Catholic charity groups, on the grounds that the organizations perform social work, not religious work, strike at the essence of Catholicism itself. These government orders, therefore, are unlawful intrusions into the free exercise of religion.

Closer to home, how can we give the supreme gift of charity – God – to others, short of teaching the faith directly?

First, and perhaps greatest of all, we can **bring someone to Mass** who would not or could not go otherwise. This someone could be a fallen-away Catholic or an elderly person who needs



St. Francis Giving His Mantle to a Poor Man by Giotto di Bondone, 1297-99 [Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi]

help getting to church. The fallen away person requires courage to issue the invitation; the elderly person requires a significant sacrifice of time to get the person in and out of our car and then the church. “You received without pay, give without pay.” (Matthew 10:8)

Second, we can **bring to Mass** those who can no longer get there. That is, we can **have a Mass offered for the repose of a deceased loved one or friend**. Better still would be to attend this Mass and offer our prayers for the deceased, as the one sacrifice of Christ is offered on the altar. In fact, I would recommend this practice for all candidates seeking Confirmation: arrange for two Masses for deceased loved ones, pay the offering

from your own pocket, and then attend each Mass. In this act, you anticipate the grace you will receive at Confirmation: the strength to bear witness to the faith and bring it to others.

Third, and not far from the first two, we can invite – or prod, as the case may be – someone to **sacramental Confession**. Reconciliation of man with God was Jesus’ mission. Each absolution restores the penitent to the union of God for which he has been made. Confession and Communion, as a pair, bring us as close to God as we can get on this side of eternity. What better gifts could we give?

Fourth, invite someone to pray with you. To pray is to bring ourselves into union with God, so each prayer accomplishes the goal of our existence. The prayers need not be grand or long. Here’s a challenging starter: the next time you dine with mixed company, at home or in public, invite your companions to say grace before eating, and then lead the prayer.

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) Jesus laid down His life so we could have God. Our charitable sacrifices should follow suit.

We lay down our lives for others not merely because “it’s the right thing to do” or because of the Golden Rule. **We give, materially and spiritually, because of God and to lead others to Him.** Authentic Christian service keeps God in the center as both our motive and our goal.

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