



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## Mercy and almsgiving

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The Pope is holding some special audiences for the Year of Mercy. On April 9, he reminded us that “an essential aspect of mercy is almsgiving”. Below are added some passages from St Josemaria’s writings that may help pray about this subject.

### Condensed from Pope Francis’ audience, April 9, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters, An essential aspect of mercy is almsgiving. Indeed, the term “alms” actually means “mercy” and is expressed in many ways. In the Old Testament God demands special attention for the poor; God wants his people to watch over them. Charity requires an attitude of inner joy. Offering mercy cannot be a burden or an annoyance from which to free ourselves in haste. The elderly Tobit, after receiving a large sum of money, called his son and instructed him: “Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you” (Tob 4:8). These are very wise words that help us understand the value of almsgiving. It is not appearances that count, but the capacity to stop in order to look in the face of that person asking for help. Almsgiving is a gesture of love and sincere attention to those who approach us and ask for our help, done in secret where God alone sees. Let us make the words of the Lord Jesus our own: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

[See full text of audience address here](#)

### **Give whatever you can**

It is sad to see what some people understand by almsgiving: a few pennies or some old clothes. They seem not to have read the Gospel.

Don’t be over-cautious: help people to acquire sufficient faith and fortitude to be ready to deny themselves generously, in this life, what they need.

And to those who lag behind, explain that it is neither very noble nor very graceful, even from an earthly point of view, to wait for the last moment, when they will be obliged to take nothing with them.

*Furrow*, no. 26

It would probably do you no harm to give up your normal means of transport occasionally and to give to charity the money you thereby save, no matter how small the amount may be. In any case, if you really have a true spirit of detachment from things, you will not fail to find all kinds of effective and unobtrusive ways of putting it into practice.

*Friends of God*, no. 125

‘Generally’, you write, ‘people are anything but generous with their money. Plenty of talk, of loud enthusiasm, of promises and plans. But at the moment of sacrifice few come forward to lend a hand. And if they do give, it has to be with “trimmings” attached: a dance, a raffle, a cinema or theatre show, or an announcement and subscription list in the newspapers.’

It’s a sad state of affairs, but it has its exceptions. May you also be one of those who, when they give alms, don’t let their left hand know what their right hand is doing.

*The Way*, no. 466

Didn’t you see the light in Jesus’ eyes as the poor widow left her little alms in the temple? Give him what you can: the merit is not in whether it is big or small, but in the intention with which you give it.

*The Way*, no. 829

Our Lord, with his arms outstretched, is continually begging for your alms of love.

*The Forge*, no. 404

### **We have to open our eyes**

Ask God boldly for this treasure, for the supernatural virtue of charity, so that you may practise it even in the smallest details.

Too often we Christians have not known how to correspond to this gift. At times we have debased it, as if it could be confined to a soulless and cold almsgiving; or we have reduced it to more or less stereotyped good works. This distortion of charity was well expressed once by a sick woman when she commented with sad resignation, ‘Yes, they treat me with “charity” here, but my mother used to look after me with affection.’ A love that springs from the Heart of Christ could never countenance such distinctions.

*Friends of God*, no. 229

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ If you want to achieve this spirit, I would advise you to be sparing with yourself while being very

generous towards others. Avoid unnecessary expenditure on luxuries and comforts, whether out of caprice, or vanity, etc. Don't create needs for yourself.

*Friends of God*, no. 123

It is easy to understand the impatience, anxiety and uneasiness of people whose naturally Christian soul stimulates them to fight the personal and social injustice which the human heart can create. So many centuries of men living side by side and still so much hate, so much destruction, so much fanaticism stored up in eyes that do not want to see and in hearts that do not want to love!

The good things of the earth, monopolized by a handful of people; the culture of the world, confined to cliques. And, on the outside, hunger for bread and education. Human lives – holy, because they come from God – treated as mere things, as statistics. I understand and share this impatience. It stirs me to look at Christ, who is continually inviting us to put his new commandment of love into practice.

*Christ is Passing By*, no. 111

We have to open our eyes; we have to look around us and recognize how God is calling us through the people at our side. We cannot turn our backs on others, ignoring them, because we are caught up in our own little world. That wasn't how Jesus lived. The Gospel often speaks of his mercy, his ability to feel the sorrow and share the needs of others. He consoled the widow of Naim; he wept at the death of Lazarus; he felt compassion for the crowds that followed him with nothing to eat; he also had pity on sinners, on those who go through life without knowing light or truth. "And when he landed, Jesus saw a large crowd, and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things."

When we are truly sons of Mary, we understand this attitude of our Lord, and our heart expands and becomes tender. We feel the sufferings, doubts, loneliness and sorrow of all other men, our brothers. And we urgently want to help them and speak to them about God, so that they can treat him as their Father and understand the motherly care which Mary is offering them.

*Christ is Passing By*, no. 146