

## **ACTIONS OF GOD CALLED THE WORKS OF MERCY**

*Mercy*, as it is here contemplated, is said to be a virtue influencing one's will to have compassion for and, if possible, to alleviate another's misfortune. It is the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas that, although mercy is, as it were, the spontaneous product of charity, yet it is to be reckoned a special virtue adequately distinguishable from this latter. In fact, the Scholastics, in cataloguing it, consider it to be referable to the quality of justice mainly because, like justice, it controls relations between distinct persons. It is, as they say, *ad alterum*. Its motive is the misery which one discerns in another, particularly in so far as this condition is deemed to be, in some sense at least, involuntary. Obviously, the necessity which is to be succored can be either of body or soul. Hence, it is customary to enumerate both corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

### **Corporal Works of Mercy**

To feed the hungry  
To give drink to the thirsty  
To clothe the naked  
To harbour the harbourless  
To visit the sick  
To ransom the captive  
To bury the dead

### **Spiritual Works of Mercy**

To instruct the ignorant  
To counsel the doubtful  
To admonish sinners  
To bear wrongs patiently  
To forgive offences willingly  
To comfort the afflicted  
To pray for the living and the dead

It will be seen from these divisions that the works of mercy practically coincide with the various forms of almsgiving. It is thus that St. Thomas regards them. The word *alms*, of course, is a corruption of the Greek *elenmosyne* (mercy). The doing of works of mercy is not merely a matter of exalted counsel; there is, as well, a strict precept imposed both by the natural and the positive Divine law enjoining their performance. That the natural law enjoins works of mercy is based upon the principle that we are to do to others as we would have them do to us.