

Because God is the Father of orphans and widows, we want to reach out to all those who are lonely and abandoned.

God takes care of us; he is our guardian. The psalmist declares him to be the "Father of orphans and defender of widows" (Ps 68:6), a title significant in the ancient world, when orphans and widows were considered the weakest elements of society. Without parents or a husband to take care of them, they were defenseless.

God does not leave us defenseless. Instead, he cares for us by sending us Jesus Christ, his only Son. Like the Good Samaritan, Jesus was especially close to the sick, hungry, lonely and poor. Through his actions toward those in need, Jesus provides the answer to Cain's question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). No matter how lonely, depressed, ostracized or angered are those in our communities and families, God has entrusted each of them to us. We are truly our "brother's keeper."

Meditation

From an address of Pope Francis given on Dec. 29, 2013.

Jesus wanted to belong to a family who experienced these hardships, so that no one would feel excluded from the loving closeness of God. The flight into Egypt caused by Herod's threat shows us that God is present where man is in danger, where man is suffering, where he is fleeing, where he experiences rejection and abandonment; but God is also present where man dreams, where he hopes to return in freedom ... It is an example that does our families great good, helping them increasingly to become communities of love and reconciliation, in which tenderness, mutual help and mutual forgiveness is experienced.

1. How is our family rich in companionship? How can we reach out to those we know who lack the love of a close family?
2. Do material things and busy schedules isolate members of our family, perhaps excluding a parent, spouse, child or sibling? Is there a way to ensure that those in our family do not feel alone?
3. Do the elderly in our family feel lonely? What are some ways we could make them feel more included in the family's love?

Family Project

Like the Good Samaritan, we are called to live out the corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, and burying the dead.

Ask each family member to help create a list of ways that your family might help the poor, the lonely and those in need. Once a month, dedicate time to such a person by making them dinner, assisting them with projects around their home, offering your prayers and support, or simply providing them company.

Even our own family members, relatives, friends and neighbors may be alone, needy or new to your parish or school. Extend an invitation to your home for dinner, and ask each of your family members to help prepare for the meal in some way.

Scripture Reading of the Month

Isaiah 58: 6-9

The sacrifices and fasting we offer to the Lord lead to many blessings

Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking off every yoke?
Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry,
bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own flesh?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
Your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: "Here I am!"