

*Teaching the Faith with*  
**CURRENT EVENTS**

# **Natural Disasters: Why Doesn't God Stop Them? How Should We Respond?**

## **Overview**

People in the Southeastern U.S. have recently endured much suffering as a result of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. An 8.1 magnitude earthquake struck Mexico last week, killing at least 90 people and affecting millions. Natural disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis have plagued all parts of the world for almost all of human history: Original Sin ushered into the created world all forms of suffering, sickness, and death. Why does God allow events like hurricanes and earthquakes to take place when He could stop them? How should we respond when they happen? This lesson explores these difficult topics and offers students a chance to reflect on how they respond to natural disasters as disciples of Christ.

## **In this lesson your students will:**

- ▶ Examine the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.
- ▶ Understand our responsibility to help those in need.
- ▶ Recognize the difference between what God directly wills, and what He allows.
- ▶ Begin to understand that God can make good come from evil.
- ▶ Put into action a plan to practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

## Resources:

- ▶ [Catholics Pray, Prepare as Hurricane Irma Looms](#) (Catholic News Agency)
- ▶ [Catholic Groups Mobilize to Help in Hurricane Harvey's Aftermath](#) (Crux Now)
- ▶ [Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen?](#) (Ascension Presents)

## Answer Key:

1. Hundreds of people have been killed, and millions of people have been affected: homes and businesses destroyed, livelihoods lost, most especially in Houston, Texas and Southwest Florida.
2. Accept reasoned answers.
3. No.
4. God's perfect will refers to those things He directly wills to happen. God is all-good, and all goodness comes from His perfect will. God's permissive will refers to those things God allows to happen, knowing that He can bring about a greater good from even the worst evil.
5. God's permissive will.
6. Accept reasoned answers.
7. Praying; helping with recovery efforts; taking collections; transporting relief items including tarps, hygiene items, and kitchen kits. Students may also note that the USCCB has asked for a special collection for Hurricane Harvey victims, which may be taking place at their parish.
8. Because we are Catholic. Helping those who are suffering is a requirement of Christian discipleship.
9. Accept reasoned answers.
10. See completed chart below.
11. See completed chart below.

<b>Work of Mercy</b>	<b>Corporal (helping the body) or Spiritual (helping the soul)?</b>	<b>How can you practice this Work of Mercy for those suffering from natural disasters?</b>
Feed the hungry	Corporal	Cook meals for a family you know. Donate food to a relief effort.

		<p>Organize a food drive or meal-delivery schedule.</p> <p>Send grocery store gift cards.</p> <p>Fast for a meal in solidarity with those who need food at this time.</p>
Give drink to the thirsty	Corporal	<p>Donate water to a relief effort.</p> <p>Send grocery store gift cards.</p> <p>Make a special effort to conserve for the sake of all those who need clean water.</p>
Clothe the naked	Corporal	<p>Buy clothing, underwear, and shoes to give to a relief effort or to a family you know.</p> <p>Donate like-new clothing to a relief effort.</p> <p>Send clothing store gift cards.</p>
Shelter the homeless	Corporal	<p>Take in a family who has been displaced.</p> <p>Help rebuild homes and other structures.</p> <p>Volunteer at a shelter.</p> <p>Donate supplies and money to charities that run shelters.</p>
Visit the sick	Corporal	<p>Volunteer at a hospital or nursing home in affected areas.</p> <p>Donate to hospitals and nursing homes.</p> <p>Organize a toy drive and deliver them to a hospital for sick children.</p>
Visit the imprisoned	Corporal	<p>Volunteer for or donate to prison ministries in areas affected.</p> <p>Make and send cards to prisoners, and children whose parents are imprisoned.</p>
Bury the dead	Corporal	<p>Attend funerals for those who lost their lives.</p> <p>Visit a cemetery.</p>
Instruct the ignorant	Spiritual	<p>Share the truth that God does not cause bad things to happen, nor are bad things part of “God’s plan.”</p>
Counsel the doubtful	Spiritual	<p>Be a friend to those who are discouraged, offering words of hope.</p>
Admonish sinners	Spiritual	<p>Speak out against looting.</p> <p>Speak out against hoarding supplies.</p>

Bear wrongs patiently	Spiritual	Be patient about calls that go un-returned, borrowed money that is not paid back, and so on, by people who are suffering during this time.
Forgive offenses willingly	Spiritual	Be forgiving of wrongs, especially by people who are suffering during this time.
Comfort the afflicted	Spiritual	Be a friend to all those affected by the storm, offering words of hope. Listen to the worries of people suffering.
Pray for the living and the dead	Spiritual	Pray for the victims of the storms and for everyone who has been suffering. Offer Masses for those who have lost their lives. Send sympathy cards offering prayers.

# Natural Disasters: Why Doesn't God Stop Them? How Should We Respond?

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**Directions:** Read the given articles and watch the Ascension Presents video, then answer the questions.

1. How have Hurricanes Harvey and Irma affected Americans in the Southeastern U.S.?
2. What other natural disasters can you recall from history?
3. Is suffering ever part of God's plan?
4. How does Fr. Mike Schmitz explain the difference between God's permissive will and His perfect will?
5. Are natural disasters like hurricanes part of God's permissive will, or His perfect will?
6. Is Fr. Schmitz's explanation satisfying to you? Why or why not?
  - a. If yes, what do you believe was the most compelling point?
  - b. If not, was there anything about the video that at least caused you to think about something in a new way? Explain what that was.
7. What are some ways Catholics are helping people affected by recent disasters?
8. As Catholics, do we help suffering people because the suffering people are Catholic, or do we help suffering people regardless of whether they are Catholic or not because we are Catholic? Explain.
9. Mercy is the form love takes when it encounters misery. When we show love to someone who is suffering, we are showing that person mercy. Have you ever shown mercy to someone? Explain.
10. The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy are ways we show love to our neighbor. The Corporal Works of Mercy concern taking care of the body. (*Corporal* comes from *corpus*, the Latin word for *body*.) The Spiritual Works of Mercy concern the soul (from the Latin *spiritus*). Listed in the chart below are the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. In the middle column, write whether each work is about helping the body or soul. Write *corporal* if it concerns the body and *spiritual* if it concerns the soul.
11. Jesus told His disciples that at the end of time, we will all be judged by how we treated the least of those among us. Read Matthew 25:31-46:  
*The Judgment of the Nations.*

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous\* will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’ Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’ He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Read these verses one more time and meditate on them for a moment. Then look at the third column in the chart below. List 1-2 ways you can perform each Work of Mercy in order to help those affected by recent natural disasters. Then discuss with your class what steps you will take to put at least some of your ideas into practice.

<b>Work of Mercy</b>	<b>Corporal (helping the body) or Spiritual (helping the soul)?</b>	<b>How can you practice this Work of Mercy for those suffering from natural disasters?</b>
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Give drink to the thirsty		
Clothe the naked		
Shelter the homeless		
Visit the sick		
Visit the imprisoned		
Bury the dead		
Instruct the ignorant		

Counsel the doubtful		
Admonish sinners		
Bear wrongs patiently		
Forgive offenses willingly		
Comfort the afflicted		
Pray for the living and the dead		

**Extension**

They say that habit becomes nature. Our habits have much to do with who we are, and who we become. If we have good habits we will cultivate virtue and be more likely to avoid sin because we will be more naturally drawn to what is good. If we have bad habits, we will sin more often, which frequently leads to committing more, worse sins. Think about the Works of Mercy in terms of habits. Choose one Work of Mercy and list some ways you can make practicing this work a habit over the next three weeks.