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Topic Three

What works of mercy have you performed or witnessed in others? How do these acts bring you closer to your faith or to God?

When I turned 5, my whole world change. I had my first seizure. It was the 6th grade teacher Tyese Smith who worked with older kids in the school to make me cards filled with poems, and words of encouragement. You see, Ms. Smith had struggles in her life and wanted me to know that I was not alone. Why would someone who did not even know me, care so much? She kept her struggles to herself but I felt myself developing a bond with her through my heart. She knew that showing strength through her students would help me to overcome this new chapter in my life.

I was eventually diagnosed with full blown epilepsy and thought my world had come to an end. Because of these difficult challenges, I learned life is often filled with many fierce battles. I have not won every battle, but I have faced them with courage. I had so many struggles and through her leadership she taught me how to face them straight on. She helped me to focus on my goals and aspirations. She taught me that I was not alone and I was not different. I was special, awesome, pretty and an angel in Gods eyes. God put me in this world to teach people how to be kind, loving and accepting. People too often look at you from the outside and totally disregard what is on the inside. She taught me that regardless of your race, culture, or means of learning, this community believes in each and every one of their students. She taught her students what it meant to live by fifth commandment and respect all human life. This saying always comes to my mind when I think of her:

"In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love." —

Mother Teresa

Ms. Smith worked with me and taught me to understand how epilepsy affected several aspects of my life; my education, my sports ability, and my constant fear of having a seizure. She taught me to look through my heart and find out what I could do and who I could impact. I decided that Epilepsy would not affect my desire to be of service to my community, compassion for helping others, and spreading the word of God through my actions and words. I searched and found out that I could help teach Children's Liturgy, I could assist with CCD classes, I could sort food at the food bank and I could continue to assist at Our Lady Queen of Peace by feeding the homeless. I could even expand my work with collecting toiletries for them and handing out 120 bags at the center. I could make a difference and I was. This is the lasting impact that she had on my life and how her faith in God inspires me to continue to be active in my church.

Ms. Smith is one of the most unselfish persons alive and this is most notable in her religious life. Sacramental life is the commitment of her existence. She reminds me a very special person named Dorothy Day. Like Dorothy Day, I often see her image praying for the hungry, praying for shelter and praying for clothing for the homeless. Although I was not one of the lucky people to have been part of the same community that Dorothy Day belonged to, Coach is the next best thing.

Ms. Smith did all of this while going through struggles in her own life. She has lupus and has to fight every day to come to school. She has to stay away from the sun and the excessive cold is enough to keep her in bed for days. She would barely be able to keep her head up in class, but her desire to teach never stopped. There would be times when money was tight or she was waiting to get medicine but it was always her who had an extra dollar to get that one

last item we needed. She always seemed to have those diapers or baby items to take, extra pack of hotdogs, chips, or snacks. She told us that if we take care of others, God will take care of us. She always quoted Mother Teresa: "There is always the danger that we may just do the work for the sake of the work. This is where the respect and the love and the devotion come in - that we do it to God, to Christ, and that's why we try to do it as beautifully as possible."

Mother Teresa

I want to continue in the world of teaching and be just like her. I want kids to know that they can have a disability but it does have to stop them from achieving their goals. I want to inspire students, teach them to help others, teach them to love, teach them to care, teach them to live as examples of God. I want to become a teacher who helps mold the minds of tomorrow's children just like she did for me. She taught me that courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says, "I'll try again tomorrow!"

Through her heroic impact on the contemporary church, I have continued to help with children's liturgy and CCD. I have become part of our church youth group so that I can continue to teach the word of God and inspire others to be part of our church. Laypersons at our church see what our youth group is doing to help our community. She taught me that we could bring church to others who can't physically come to our church. We do this the last Sunday of every month. Ms. Smith has even inspired my mom to become an Extraordinary Minister because she sees the impact that she has had on me.

I have searched high and low for whose mercy would bring me closer to my faith and God just placed her under the heavenly spotlight for me to find. Ms. Smith always said "Love

me without restriction, trust me without fear, want me without demand, accept me for who I am." Ms. Smith and Mother Teresa both live by the same example, "Be kind whenever possible, it is always possible."

She has taught me that throughout life you may lose a battle but not always the war. Being diagnosed with epilepsy was a crucial and challenging experience for me, but it has made my trust in God even stronger. I continue to make it through the battle, and I am determined to win the war.