



Counsel the Doubtful: *Am I qualified?*

Over the last year Pope Francis invited us to celebrate a Jubilee Year of Mercy ~ Merciful Like the Father. This month we turn our focus to the spiritual work of mercy, **Counsel the Doubtful** – and as we explore what this means and what tools or skills are needed, we inevitably ask the question, "Am I qualified to Counsel the Doubtful?"

Do not fear, we are qualified and it is through our belief in Him that we are qualified!

What does it mean to Counsel the Doubtful? The intention is to provide guidance to those who seek counseling and help them find their faith in Him. Where to begin? We can start by listening.

How often do we greet family, friends, co-workers or fellow parishioners with "Hi! How are you?" but quickly walk past without hearing their response? Are we actually interested in how they are doing or are we mere robots going through the normal polite niceties?

If we genuinely care and have an interest then we should pause when asking "how are you" so we can hear their response. If we are in tune with that person, we will not only "hear" with our ears, but will also "hear" with our heart. When we listen with our heart, we are more likely to respond to the calling of Counseling the Doubtful – we will be able to answer without judgment, but with compassion and kindness.

Several years ago I received a phone call from a family member, and I could hear in his voice that he wasn't alright – and for the first time, when I asked, "How are you?" he responded, "I am not well and would like to talk with you."

"Of course," I said, "would you like to discuss now?" He wanted to talk in person, and we planned to meet the next day.

When he came by our home the next day, he barely got in the door before breaking down. I hugged him, told him no matter what it was, I would always love him. After listening to his story, it broke my heart that for nearly 30+ years this amazing, kind-hearted, loving individual had been unable to live his true self.

I had been close to this person for more than 40 years – and I didn't even know the internal fight he endured. As I look back on that day, I learned an important lesson – when faced with Counseling the Doubtful, it's important to

be compassionate, to be kind and to listen. I wasn't asked advice or direction, but he simply needed someone to hear him.

How can we practice our faith and put into action Counseling the Doubtful?

- Be a good listener – in this age of technology and gadgets, it's extremely important to connect face to face – put down the smart phone, tablet or computer and engage with your family and friends. By seeing facial expressions and hearing the tone in one's voice, we can better understand and serve our loved one in need.
- Provide direction and counsel to our own children – reassure them in these times of uncertainty, when anxiety may run high due to a rapidly changing world where bullying in school and through social media are more prevalent – letting them know we are here to listen to them, pray with them and support them.
- Support friends and family struggling in their marriage – listen and encourage them to pray to better understand one another. Ask them if Christ is in the heart of their marriage – if He is not, encourage them to invite Him in. A good resource to offer is Retrouvaille, a Catholic program designed to help heal troubled marriages.
- With love and support, provide guidance to a young woman faced with an unplanned pregnancy. See this new life as a gift and blessing from God. Offer your assistance by taking her to Birthright International where excellent resources and guidance on topics from pregnancy and child birth to parenting skills are available.
- Show compassion to those who wrestle with emotional issues – it may not be an issue we even understand, but by offering an ear to listen and heart filled with hope, we can show them Christ's love and encourage them to turn to Him for healing.

The most important tool needed to practice the Spiritual Work of Mercy of Counsel the Doubtful is prayer – it's imperative that we pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak through us to give guidance to those in need of good counsel. And then, we listen.

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