



# NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE US SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

## Contemplation: Redeeming Our Miles

“There but for the grace of God go I” we often think when we meet the neighbor on our home visits. We are reminded how precarious and fragile life can be, and how easily any one of us can fall into deprivation through no fault of our own. We offer our gentle encouragement and try to be as generous as possible in relieving the needs of our suffering neighbors. Often, we leave feeling deeply moved and even transformed by the encounter. These visits seem to bear out Frédéric’s observation that they are *“more for ourselves than for them”*. [\[82, to Curnier, 1834\]](#)

But then there are the “frequent flyers.” You know, the ones who just called last month, and the month before, and who knows how many times before that. It isn’t just that they call frequently – sometimes we don’t hear from them for a year. It just seems like when they do call, it’s always the same thing, and it so often seems easily avoidable. We know them already. We’ve met them a dozen times. It’s hard to identify with them, because sometimes it seems like they are just choosing to fall behind.

And they don’t seem to listen to our advice, or at least not to heed it. They don’t have to follow our advice, of course, but we’ve tried to develop a relationship of trust and friendship. We only offer advice out of love, and our help is never conditional on taking our advice.

But come on! How many times do we have to keep doing the same old thing before we just cut them off? We don’t want to give up on them, but maybe we should try to be a little more – I don’t know – tough?

That’s hard to do, too, though, isn’t it? Even if it seems like their own fault that the light bill is overdue (again) we don’t want them to suffer in the summer heat. Even if they spent that big tax refund last month (why are they getting a tax refund anyway?) instead of thinking about the rent this month, we don’t want to see them (and their kids) thrown out on the street.

Our frustration builds when we see who’s calling. We already know what they’re calling about. It’s the thing they were certain would never happen again, so before we answer, we try to remind ourselves it isn’t supposed to be about the money, even though it always seems to work out that way. If it is *“more for ourselves than for them”*, is it they who are missing something each time we talk, or is it us?

And so, the call for mercy begins, just as it always does: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned...”

### Contemplate

Do I offer the same mercy that I am prepared to accept for myself?

### Recommended Reading

[Letters of Frédéric Ozanam, Volume I](#)