

Lesson 22

Catholic Social Teaching

In the creation account found in the Book of Genesis, we read how God created the world and gave man the responsibility to care for it. This take also includes making a more just world by respecting and loving others. Care for God's Creation involves Good Stewardship. The goods of the earth are gifts from God, and they are intended by God for the benefit of everyone; therefore, it is our duty to use the fruits of creation wisely. The Catholic Church must address economic and social matters that relate to the basic rights of people and communities in this ever-changing world. The Church's Catholic Social Teaching helps us find direction on how to care for all of God's creation and how to thank God actively for His abundant gifts.

Catholic Social Teaching is the Church's teaching about the ordering of life in society and about the attainment of individual and social justice. There are four central principles contained in Catholic Social Teaching: Personhood, Solidarity, the Common Good, and Subsidiarity.

1. Personhood

Personhood refers to the life and dignity of each human being, especially in light of them as children of God. We are called to recognize the Dignity of the Human Person. All human life is sacred: this is the starting point for moral teaching. Human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency – food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education.



2. Solidarity

The principle of Solidarity states that we are all a part of God's family because we are all children of God. Hence, we are one human family regardless of our nationality, race, gender, age, religion, or sexually. At its heart, solidarity is

the attitude of strength and unity that leads to the sharing of spiritual and material goods. Solidarity unites rich and poor, weak and strong, to foster a society in which all give what they can and receive what they need. The idea of solidarity is based on the common origin of all humanity. Solidarity aims at strengthening community and promoting a “civilization of love” (*Saint Pope John Paul II*). At the core of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. In short, solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; it is a desire for complete oneness with others.

3. Common Good

The Common Good is the principle that all human beings can live in society with freedom, peace, and security. In other words, the common good is the good that is shared by all in common. The common good must be the business of everyone. The common good is best served where the good of the individual person and of the smaller units of society (*such as the family*) are central. When it comes to the common good, we realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others. The common good is not the good for the greatest number of people (*that would leave out some people*); rather, every person must participate in the common good. Following the principles of the common good means that people have the right to develop their talents and skills to become the best individuals they can be. The political, social, economic, and cultural environment must produce conditions that enable everyone to do this. The principles of the common good are best dealt with at the local level by the people most directly involved with the social issues.



4. Subsidiarity

The principle of Subsidiarity states: What individuals can accomplish by their own initiative and efforts should not be taken from them by a higher authority (*such as government*). Subsidiarity is the principle that the best institutions for responding to a particular social task or need are those closest to it. The responsibility of the closest political or private institution is to assist those in need. Only when issues cannot be resolved at the local level should they be resolved at a higher level.

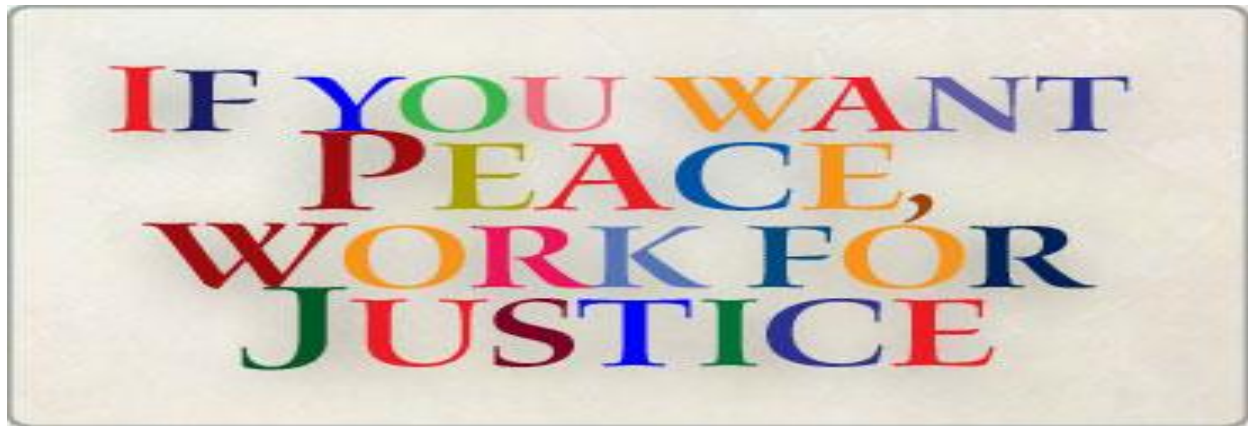
The government has a special role and responsibility to its citizens. The government is an instrument to promote human dignity, protect human rights, and build the common good. All people have a right and a responsibility to participate in political institutions so that government can achieve its proper goals.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT LEADERS LISTEN TO WHAT
EVERYBODY HAS TO SAY.



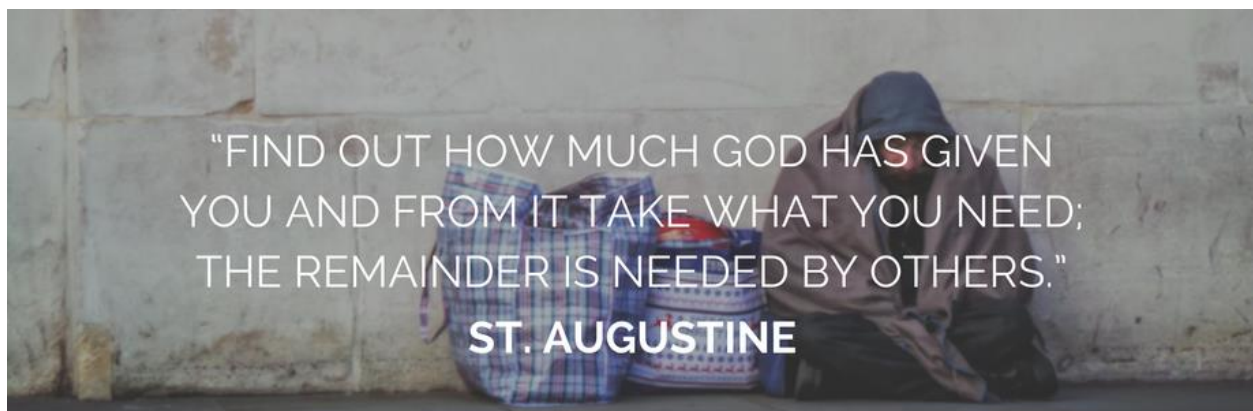
Social Justice is a major part of the Catholic Social Teaching. It is through Social Justice that we are fully able to understand and respect the dignity of man, the crown of God's creation. Social Justice is the fair and equal treatment of every member of society. It is required by the dignity and freedom of every person. The Catholic Church has developed a body of social principles and moral teachings described in papal and other official documents. This teaching deals with the economic, political, and social order of the world.

Social Justice is rooted in the Bible and in the traditional theological teachings of the Catholic Church. Social Justice is designed to eradicate "Social Sin" (*social situations and/or institutions that are against the will of God*). Because of the personal sins of individuals, entire societies can develop structures that are sinful in and of themselves. Social sins include racism, sexism, structures that deny people access to adequate health care, and the destruction of environment for the benefit of a few individuals.



Families are often at the center of social justice issues. All human life is sacred and all people must be respected and valued over material goods. We are called to ask whether our actions as a society respect or threaten the life and dignity of both the human person and the family. Participation in family and community is central to our faith and to a healthy society. Families must be supported so that people can participate in society, build a community spirit, and promote the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Every person has a right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. As Catholics, we have a responsibility to protect these basic human rights in order to achieve a healthy society. Therefore, we are called to help the poor and needy. The **Preferential Option for the Poor** states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. Thus, the true moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. In our world, many people are very rich, while at the same time, many are extremely poor. As a part of God's universal family, we are called to pay special attention to the needs of the poor by defending and promoting their dignity and by meeting their immediate material needs.



Part of Social Justice is **Economic Justice**; this guides the relationship between the people and the nation's economy. The economy must serve the people. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions. They also have a fundamental right to organize and join unions. People have a right to

economic initiative and private property, but these rights have limits. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life. All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. We are called to seek Global Solidarity and Development since we are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. Therefore, we are called to work globally for justice.



An easy guide to Catholic Social Teaching Principles



Respect Life Issues

Respect Life is a part of Social Justice and caring for God's Creation because life is God's gift to us. Life is sacred because it comes from God. Since life begins at the moment of conception, we are called to protect and respect life from the womb to the tomb. There are certain issues in society that threaten the dignity of life at both the initial and final stages that the Church fights in order for humanity to respect the dignity and life of all.

At the center of all Catholic social teaching is the transcendence of God and the dignity of the human person. The human person is the clearest reflection of God's presence in the world; all of the Church's work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to

protect and promote the dignity of every person. For each person not only reflects God, but is the expression of God's creative work and the meaning of Christ's redemptive ministry.

The issues that directly oppose a true respect for life in its earliest stages are: contraception, abortion, artificial insemination, In Vitro Fertilization (*or Embryo Transfer*), sperm or egg donors, and human cloning. The two major issues that directly oppose life in its final stages are: capital punishment (*the death penalty*) and Euthanasia (*Mercy Killing*). All of these issues directly oppose the teachings of the Catholic Church because they disregard the value of human life.

Five other topics that directly oppose life at all stages are: discrimination, racism, bullying, poverty, and war.

Discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, or age continues to exist and can never be justified. Such discrimination constitutes a grave injustice and an affront to human dignity. It must be aggressively resisted by every individual and rooted out of every social institution and structure.



Racism is a particularly serious form of discrimination. Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil dividing the human family.

Bullying is a direct attack against the dignity of a person as a child of God. Catholics are called to protect the dignity of the human person without exception. We must recognize that bullying is an attack on human dignity and, therefore, we must stand in solidarity with the victims of bullying so as to call for its end.

Poverty is an issue that assaults the dignity of the human person because it denies the individual of material items needed to maintain a healthy life: shelter, clothing, food, water, and monetary resources. The poor and needy must be a primary focus in our faithful

following of Jesus Christ. Through its social teaching, the Church proclaims that the goods of the earth are to be enjoyed by all. "God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people" (*The Church in the Modern World*, #69). "Every person has the right to find in the world what is necessary for themselves" (*The Development of the Peoples*, #22). "The suffering of the poor increases daily. This is not only a moral scandal but also a dangerous threat to our democratic stability" (*Hear the Cry of the Poor*, #28).

War is defined as a state of conflict between two or more sovereign nations carried on by force of arms. Catholic teaching recognizes the right of nations to defend themselves against unjust aggression and the protection of human rights. The Church holds that those who have others under their care must defend them from attack. Legitimate defense is not only a right but also a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others and the defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. World Peace is the ultimate goal.

A JUST WAR

MUST MEET THESE REQUIREMENTS

1. A LAST RESORT

Only if ALL peaceful methods fail

2. A JUST CAUSE

Must correct a grave, immediate, ongoing evil

3. VALID AUTHORITY

Must arise from a consistent policy or principle

4. PROBABLE SUCCESS

Men can't be sent to die hopelessly

5. PROPORTIONALITY

Force must be proportionate, and no more than necessary

6. EXIT STRATEGY

It must be fought fairly and end as quickly as possible

When it comes to the justification of war, the following two important principles must be applied:

1) **Principle of Proportionality of Means**

This principle demands that the degree of force used must be reasonable in light of the military goal. In other words, one must not needlessly risk lives or cause more harm than one is trying to prevent.

2) **Principle of Discrimination (Noncombatant Immunity)**

This principle forbids targeting civilian populations. Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The Church's social teaching shows us how to build a just society and live lives of holiness in the 21st century.

Each person is **SACRED**,
made in God's image, equal in dignity.

Each person is **SOCIAL**,
called to participate in family and community.

All people have **RIGHTS** and **RESPONSIBILITIES**.
The right to life and its necessities, the responsibility to respect the rights of others and work for the common good.

We care for people who are **POOR** and vulnerable,
before all else.

Workers have rights. **WORK** has dignity.
We are partners with God in creation.

SOLIDARITY is our call.
We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

We care for **CREATION**.
We live in interdependence with all God has made.

The Theological and Cardinal Virtues can help us in our everyday practice of the faith. Thus, these virtues can assist us in our efforts to respect life and practice social justice. There are three theological virtues (*faith, hope, and charity*) and four cardinal virtues (*prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance*).

The Theological Virtues help direct our lives toward God:

1. Faith

Faith is the ability to believe in God and to give our lives to Him. Faith calls us not only to believe in God but also to decide to give ourselves totally to Him. When we give our life to God, we are acting for the good of others. Faith enables us to accept all that God has revealed as true. In short, faith is the virtue that allows us to believe in God.

2. Hope

Hope is our desire for all the good things God has planned for us. It enables us to trust in God to grant us eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Hope helps us trust that if we live according to Jesus' teachings, we will one day enter his eternal kingdom. Hope also helps us do what pleases God, even when it is difficult or when we get discouraged. Hope is the virtue that gives us confidence that God's plan will unfold, as it should—even if it doesn't happen right now or in the way we expect. In short, hope is the virtue by which we desire Eternal Life as the reward for our faith and good works.

3. Charity

Charity is the virtue we use to show our love for God. It is the virtue that enables us to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. When we love God, we allow Him to be at the center of our lives. We ask God for His help in everything we say and do. We also exhibit charity in our love for other people. Jesus reminds us that often we are called to make sacrifices to show our love for all. The practice of charity brings the three Theological Virtues together in perfect harmony. This is why charity is called the "Queen of all Virtues."

The four Cardinal Virtues are acquired through education and good works. The word "Cardinal" means "that on which other things depend." These virtues help us to act the right way and develop character.

1. Prudence

Prudence is the virtue that helps us discern good from evil and abide by our conscience. This virtue helps us know and choose the good in the circumstances of life. Prudence directs all the other virtues since it is the ability to recognize what is right. After all, someone who wants to lead a good life must know what the "good" is and recognize its true worth. Only a prudent person can apply the virtues of justice, fortitude, and temperance so as to do good. Saint Ignatius Loyola said, "Prudence has two eyes, one that foresees what one has to do, the other that examines afterward what one has done."

2. Justice

Justice is the strong will to rightly give what is due to God and neighbor. This virtue allows us to give God and our neighbor what is rightly owed to them. The guiding principle of justice is: "to each his due." Justice is concerned with equity and longs to see people get that to which they are entitled. We must allow justice to govern our relations with God and give Him what is His: our love and worship. "Justice without mercy is unloving; mercy without justice is degrading."

3. Fortitude

Fortitude is the strength and courage to face difficulties and do what is right. This virtue strengthens our resolve to choose good over evil. Someone who practices fortitude perseveres in his commitment to the good, once he has recognized it, even if in the extreme case he must sacrifice even his own life for it.

4. Temperance

Temperance is the virtue of moderation in pleasures, providing balance in the use of material goods. This virtue helps us dominate our instincts and desire for pleasures. The individual that lacks temperance abandons himself to the rule of his impulses, offends others by his inordinate desires, and harms himself.

