

A Season of Catholic Social Teaching

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

November 2020: The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” *(Matthew 25:40)*

The Gospel is clear, so who are the “least brothers of mine”? They are near and far. We see the poor on street corners, on our door step, and on the news in countries across the globe. Though they are often described as “the forgotten of society,” the pandemic has opened our eyes and magnified the disparities between the rich and poor, spotlighting the ills of our society.

Who can wrap their minds around people dying of hunger, condemned to illiteracy, having no roof over their heads or no medical care? Perhaps by putting on the shoes of the Mother deciding to feed her family today instead of paying the rent or the Father who cannot take the job because he has no way to get there, it becomes personal. A sixth of our children are growing up poor in the richest nation on earth. Whose responsibility are they?

Whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and material, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God’s providence, for the benefit of others.

Pope Leo XIII, 1891 Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*

In God’s plan, each individual is called to promote his or her own development, and this includes finding the best economic and technological means of multiplying goods and increasing wealth. Business abilities, which are a gift from God, should always be clearly directed to the development of others and to eliminating poverty.

Pope Francis, 2020 Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*

Catholic doctrine is clear. Practice in our Church, not so much.

We are the church and bear the responsibility to live our faith and build a peaceable world for all God’s children. The seven principles of Catholic Social

Teaching do not stand alone. They weave in and out of each other. Were we to follow them, the fabric of all our lives would improve. And more importantly, the lives of “the other” would improve. Whose voice are we not hearing?

We witness greed and “What’s in it for me” behavior causing global warming, conflict, racism, polarization, unchecked disease, hunger, homelessness and a great divide in health and wealth. Maybe we can’t change the world, but we can change some of it. Let us imitate Jesus’ love of the poor by putting them first in society by passing legislation to change systems that favor the powerful and rich. Let us choose the policy or resource distribution that will improve the lives of those less fortunate. Let us pray and listen, trusting God to lead us. Let us commit to use our power to help others. Let us allow love to change us.

In his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Inuente* in 2001, Pope John Paul II said, “Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning His voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty.” It is our task as Christians to move from talk to action, from service to advocacy, so that we have a just society.

The realities of poverty today are shaped by powerful economic, moral, and cultural forces. Among these is the rapid pace of globalization—the increasing global connections among our economic, cultural, social, and political lives. While we are becoming more connected as one human community, we live and work in very different economies. Our habits that bring our comfort and our nationalistic policies impact the poor across the globe.

The World Bank reports that COVID-19 has dealt an unprecedented setback to the worldwide effort to end extreme poverty, raise median incomes, and create shared prosperity. They project that by 2021 an additional 110 to 150 million people will have fallen into extreme poverty, with 270 million on the brink of starvation and we see it on our streets.

Whose responsibility are they? Jesus called us to follow His way and live out the teaching of solidarity: they are our responsibility.

St. John Chrysostom said, “If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find Him in the chalice.”

Peggy Meyer