

Catholic Social Teaching Theme 6

Solidarity

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice."¹ The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

Scripture

- Genesis 12:1-3
God blessed Israel so that all nations would be blessed through it.
- Psalms 72
Living in right relationship with others brings peace.
- Psalms 122
Peace be with you! For the sake of the Lord, I will seek your good.

Zechariah 8:16

These are the things you should do: Speak truth, judge well, make peace.

- Matthew 5:9
Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God.
- Matthew 5:21-24
Be reconciled to one another before coming to the altar.
- Romans 13:8-10
Living rightly means to love one another.
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-26
If one member of Christ's body suffers, all suffer. If one member is honored, all rejoice.
- Colossians 3:9-17
Above all, clothe yourself with love and let the peace of Christ reign in your hearts.
- 1 John 3:16-18
The love of God in us is witnessed to by our willingness to lay down our lives for others as Christ did for us.

Tradition

[Solidarity] is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo rei Socialis. . .)*, #38

At another level, the roots of the contradiction between the solemn affirmation of human rights and their tragic denial in practice lies in a notion of freedom which exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service of them. . . It is precisely in this sense that Cain's answer to the Lord's question: "Where is Abel your brother?" can be interpreted: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). Yes, every man is his "brother's keeper", because God entrusts us to one another. *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae. . .)*, #19

We have to move from our devotion to independence, through an understanding of interdependence, to a commitment to human solidarity. That challenge must find its realization in the kind of community we build among us. Love implies concern for all - especially the poor - and a continued search for those social and economic structures that permit everyone to share in a community that is a part of a redeemed creation (Rom 8:21-23). *Economic Justice for All*, #365

Interdependence must be transformed into *solidarity*, based upon the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all. . . On Social Concern. . . (*Sollicitudo rei Socialis*), #39

To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is the good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of "all of us", made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society . . . To desire the *common good* and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity. *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate. . .)*, #7

The solidarity which binds all men together as members of a common family makes it impossible for wealthy nations to look with indifference upon the hunger, misery and poverty of other nations whose citizens are unable to enjoy even elementary human rights. The nations of the world are becoming more and more dependent on one another and it will not be possible to preserve a lasting peace so long as glaring economic and social imbalances persist. *On Christianity and Social Progress (Mater et Magistra. . .)*, #157

It is good for people to realize that purchasing is always a moral — and not simply economic — act. Hence *the consumer has a specific social responsibility*, which goes hand-in-hand with the social responsibility of the enterprise. Consumers should be continually educated regarding their daily role, which can be exercised with respect for moral principles without diminishing the intrinsic economic rationality of the act of purchasing. . . It can be helpful to promote new ways of marketing products from deprived areas of the world, so as to guarantee their producers a decent return. *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate. . .)*, #66

Discussion Questions

1. Many middle-aged and older Catholics grew up with a keen sense of "mission" and concern for children half a world away. Years ago we raised funds for "pagan babies," cleaned our plates, and prayed after Mass for the conversion of Russia. We didn't have global TV networks or the Internet, but we had a sense of responsibility. Over the years, we have continued this tradition through our missions, our collections for and advocacy on international needs, and our global development

programs. We need to acknowledge and renew this traditional Catholic consciousness in a new age of global communications and economic interdependence. We respond very generously when the network news tells us of hurricanes and famines, but how will we help those victimized by the less visible disasters of poverty caused by structural injustice, such as debt, ethnic conflict, and the arms trade? Our Church and parishes must call us anew to sacrifice and concern for a new generation of children who need food, justice, peace, and the Gospel. A central task for the next century is building families of faith that reach out beyond national boundaries.

Am I attentive only to my local neighbors or also those across the globe?

2. Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gn 4:9), has global implications and is a special challenge for our time, touching not one brother but all our sisters and brothers. Are we responsible for the fate of the world's poor? Do we have duties to suffering people in far-off places? Must we respond to the needs of suffering refugees in distant nations? Are we keepers of the creation for future generations?

For the followers of Jesus, the answer is yes. Indeed, we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. As members of God's one human family, we acknowledge our duties to people in far-off places. We accept God's charge to care for all human life and for all creation.

We have heard the Lord's command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." In our linked and limited world, loving our neighbor has global implications. In faith, we know our neighbors live in Rwanda and Sudan, in East Timor and China, in Bosnia and Central America, as well as across our country and next door. Baptism, confirmation, and continuing participation in the body of Christ call us to action for "the least among us" without regard for boundaries or borders.

Do I see all members of the human family as my brothers and sisters?

3. One of the most important ways to focus on the Catholic call to solidarity is through prayer and worship. In our parishes, the Eucharist represents a central setting for discovering and expressing solidarity. Gathered around the altar, we are reminded of our connection to all of God's people through the mystical body of Christ. The Eucharist makes present the sacrifice of Calvary in which Christ's blood is shed for the redemption of the world. Our call to solidarity has its roots in this mystery and in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which we proclaim every time we gather for Eucharist.

While care must be taken to avoid ideological uses of liturgy, the Eucharist and the Gospel call the Church to proclaim and express the global solidarity of the people of God. International concerns can be reflected in the introduction to the Mass, general intercessions, and music. There is no greater opportunity to help Catholics understand the social dimensions of our faith than in the homily. Preachers can connect the gospel message of love for our neighbor and the biblical values of justice and peace to the real struggles of people in other lands that we see on the evening news. Inviting returned missionaries or relief workers to preach or speak to the congregation can provide examples of faith in action that can lead to concrete acts of solidarity. We can also use various collections for missions, development, and relief as opportunities to raise awareness and promote action on the needs of people in other lands. Through prayer, worship, and preaching we can deepen our understanding of the call to build greater justice and peace.

Is solidarity incorporated into my prayer and spirituality? Do I lift up vulnerable people throughout the world in my prayer, or is it reserved for only my personal concerns?

4. Pope John Paul II has written, "Sacred Scripture continually speaks to us of an active commitment

to our neighbor and demands of us a shared responsibility for all of humanity. This duty is not limited to one's own family, nation or state, but extends progressively to all . . . so no one can consider himself extraneous or indifferent to the lot of another member of the human family" (*Centesimus Annus* [CA], no. 51).

Solidarity is action on behalf of the one human family, calling us to help overcome the divisions in our world. Solidarity binds the rich to the poor. It makes the free zealous for the cause of the oppressed. It drives the comfortable and secure to take risks for the victims of tyranny and war. It calls those who are strong to care for those who are weak and vulnerable across the spectrum of human life. It opens homes and hearts to those in flight from terror and to migrants whose daily toil supports affluent lifestyles. Peacemaking, as Pope John Paul II has told us, is the work of solidarity.

Does the way I spend my time reflect a genuine concern for others?

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, who created us in image,
Grant us Grace fearlessly to contend against evil
and to make no peace with oppression;
and, that we may reverently use our freedom,
help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities
and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen

Closing Prayer

We cannot merely pray to you O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in way
That man must find his own path to peace.
Within himself and with his neighbor.

We cannot merely pray to You O God, to end starvation;
For You have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world,
If we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair,
For you have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope,
If we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice;
For You have already given us eyes
With which to see the good in all men,
If we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
For You have given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healing,
If we would only use them constructively.
Therefore we pray to You instead, O God,
for strength, determination and will power,

to do instead of just pray, to become instead of merely to wish.

Amen