

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

– PART II –

The Catholic Church remains committed to the changes set forth by the Second Vatican Council over 50 years ago. Pope Francis often calls the faithful to the founding goals of Vatican II and remains committed to the vibrancy and vision of the Council. To support the goals of the Council, principles of teaching and actions, referred to as Catholic Social Teaching (CST) were written. Given the challenges of today's world, CST demands our attention. Even though they are not new, many Catholics remain unaware of the scope and support of CST. We continue to offer our readers information and reflection on CST and the necessity of it in our spirituality and in our actions. Cathy Lanning Knittel, a teacher in the Theology Department at Saint Joseph Academy, Cleveland, and Sister Pat Kozak, CSJ, offer insights on their personal integration of CST and ways for us to embrace CST, including an 7-week spiritual exercise with scripture reading supporting CST and ways to apply CST to our daily actions. We seek to make CST real and present in our lives as we make decisions and choices.

Ite Missa Est As Church, we are Called and Sent Forth

BY CATHY LANNING KNITTEL,
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Like many of you I grew up in the pre-Vatican II era, and literally came of age during the Council. I'm still living in the post age of that amazing moment in time. It has been and continues to be, on many levels and in many contexts, a wonderfully wild ride. In addition to trying to make sense of it all for my own life, I am now in my 31st year of teaching high school at my alma mater. I very often reference the Council because it changed my life personally, and also changed what it meant to be a Catholic (both in the institutional and individual realm) in ways that are still being discovered over 50 years since the Council's closing sessions.

Whoever said that when one becomes a teacher, by their students they are taught, was spot on! Walking with my



▲ Cathy Lanning Knittel

students through these post conciliar times and trying to discern what our faith response can and should be has been a pilgrimage of sorts. Being asked to respond to issues that had not previously been thought of as matters of our religious practice as well as trying to respond to God's Revelation, particularly the message of the Gospel, was a challenging journey that has yet to end. Who would have considered prior to 1960 that being a good steward of the created cosmos, for

example, was part of what it meant to be a Catholic? Considering this post-conciliar pilgrimage recently caused me to look back on life before the Council – or better put, what life *seemed* to be like in those years. Life was much simpler; answers seemed obvious, everyone went along with the program, and “Father” really did know best; at least that is how it appeared.

When I investigate and discuss the Council with my students I mention to them that, in my opinion and experience, the major shift pre- and post-Vatican II was that for the first time we began to understand the *connection* between our faith and the “real” world; what we now refer to as Catholic Social Teaching. That connection had always been present in the Sacred Scriptures, in the history and Tradition of the Catholic Church, and in the example of great men and women from every time period who set a high bar as exemplars of what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. But we lost track of that connection and as a Church

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seemed to concentrate more on tasks and goals involving organization, structure, and rubrics. As necessary as an operative framework is for any organization, perhaps our reasons for being Church were overshadowed by the structural aspects of the process of faith in action.

Learning new ways of being can be difficult. The last 50 years have shown us this. We are still working through how to understand the essential nature of not just praying for justice and peace, but for actually DOING justice which will lead to that peace that all people desire. It can be scary and certainly unfamiliar to understand that in so many areas of my life including the work I do and how I do that work that I also have my responsibilities regarding the environment. I need to wade through the systems and structures of our society and learn (and re-learn) the moral imperatives that everyone has a right to not merely exist but to thrive and flourish. I cannot opt out of the pursuit and protection of everyone's rights. It can be hard to look at issues involving respect for life and the inherent dignity of ALL, the scourge of poverty, the scandal of hunger, capital punishment, nuclear arms proliferation, race relations to name a few, and realize

that I must address these issues through the lens of my Catholic faith. My faith and the life I live in the world are not separate – they exist in consort one with the other.

I suppose for most of us, it is easier to segment our existence into smaller pieces. We seem to find it less foreboding if we can reduce the multiple parts of our lives into piles. Maybe that is why I see so many stories about avoiding clutter, getting organized (finally) and how getting organized will make your life worth living and make you more loveable and everyone will want to be you, – and on and on. Although organization is basically a good practice, life isn't always manageable – life, in all of its wonder and majesty, gets complicated, even messy sometimes.

Might this desire to be organized be part of the reason that some wonderful and good people just can't wrap their heads around why the Church or some members of the Church are so concerned about issues that seem to them to be none of our business as Catholics? Rather than “us versus them” or “I'm right and you're wrong,” can we accept that we are new to this approach of connecting life lived in the secular realm, with God's invitation

to, “love one another as I have loved you.” My life in the world and my faith are inextricably linked.

Perhaps each of us taking some time for reflection and introspection regarding the application of what has become known as the Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching is a good place to start. This “list” was formulated by the American Catholic Bishops in 1998 in a pastoral letter entitled, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching; Challenges and Directions*. You can readily see by the title of the document that the bishops knew we were going in a different direction and there would be challenges; indeed there have been and are.

One final thought; I am surrounded by a family of legitimate Classics scholars – truly. I asked my son, Peter, who holds a master's degree in Classics, what the literal translation was of the phrase, “Ite missa est.” You might notice this as the title of this piece but not referenced yet in the body of the article. This Latin phrase from the old rite of the Roman Mass has been in my mind as I wrote. I remember hearing that it really meant not “Go, the Mass is ended” but rather something on the order of “You are sent,” in other words, now the real work begins. I always thought that was so apropos; we have reflected on God's Word, we have nourishment for the work to be done (Eucharist), now let's get to that work, together, for all of us.

Peter actually said that the phrase, “ite missa est” literally means “something *feminine* has been sent.” He went on to say that perhaps it referenced us – all of us – as Church, and that the word “church” is often referred to using the feminine gender as the descriptor. God blessed men and women and sent us forth to be persons of Christ to one another. Are we not incredibly blessed to be so?

Living the Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

BY SISTER PAT KOZAK, CSJ

Faith has never been simply a matter of *what* I believe; rather it offers a challenge for the *way I live* my life. Perhaps that’s why we talk about the *practice* of our faith. Hopefully, we’re always trying to deepen our faith, make it fuller, more loving and encompassing. So we keep practicing; we keep working at it and growing.

To get real about this practice of faith, we need to get underneath the words of the Gospel and of any church teaching, down to the practice of love that is at the heart of the teaching. This is often a messy task; it needs to be governed by a wisdom, by respect, and most essentially, by the primacy of love.

Whether you are actively praying this Lent or not, why not consider committing to 7 weeks of *practice* of Catholic Social Teaching? Think

about it. Musicians practice daily to be better at their craft; athletes embrace rigorous daily training to improve; scientists undertake disciplined, daily research to uncover a new discovery. Doesn’t it make sense that prayer, one of the most important of all projects, should have a daily practice?

We invite you to tear-off the prayer and study guide on the right, and put it somewhere that you will see it daily during Lent, or any 7 weeks of your life.

However; this invitation comes with a warning. This prayer practice is likely to change you. Your life will get messier. While your faith may become stronger, even simpler, your sense of participating in a sacred mystery may deepen. You may have fewer easy answers as you actually think about, *what does love require?* You are likely to find yourself being invited to actions with the example of the mystifying compassion of Jesus: “forgiving 70 times 7” or “walking the extra mile” or “welcoming the stranger.” Praying with the Gospel or with Catholic Social Teaching is



▲ Sister Pat Kozak

not for sissies. It is intended for those with the largest of hearts, for those who want to hold out hope for the future, for those who believe.

It is our hope that with these reflections, we might build a community of readers who commit to the Catholic Social Teaching. In the process, as a company of believers, we will allow ourselves to be changed and transformed, and in the process change our world. ■

Perhaps that’s why we talk about the *practice* of our faith. We never quite finish; we’re always trying to get it a little fuller and deeper, more loving and encompassing. So we keep practicing; we keep working at it and growing.

7 WEEKS, 7 PRINCIPLES

Getting started - Determine a regular time of day when you can claim 20 minutes for yourself. Put away your cell phone. Settle in your chair. Close your eyes. Breathe easily until you feel yourself slow down. Read the teaching for the week and sit with the questions for reflection. Stay with a reading longer if you find it particularly challenging or nourishing. Be open to the Spirit of Love moving in your heart and head. On the last day of each week, reread the Theme of the week. How has your understanding of this changed or deepened? Take time to express gratitude to God and to others who have been part of your awakening this week.

WEEK ONE: All Life is Sacred



All life is sacred and the dignity of the person is central to a moral vision for society. Each person possesses dignity because he or she is created in God's image. Such dignity and the rights that flow from this are inherent, inviolable, and inalienable.

In the creation stories in Genesis, we read that God created sun and moon, animals, plants of all kinds – and humans, male and female. *It is good*, God said, over and again. God's statement was not selective. One plant was not better than another, one animal more important, one star brighter, or one gender preferred. Rather, *God saw that it was good*; everything, everyone.

If I apply this generosity of judgment and love found in Genesis to the first theme, how might the Spirit of God be inviting me to grow in love? As I consider my own experience of the diversity of people, culture, age and gender, where am I most apt to judge or

notice bias? What personal experience or hurt contributes to the bias I hold? For what healing can I pray?

What is one small practice I can put into place today to move in the direction of greater and more inclusive love?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: Genesis 1; 1Cor 3:16-23; Deut 10:17-19; Luke 10:25-37; John 4:1-42

How do these readings invite me to become more appreciative of the dignity of each person? Who among my circle of friends and colleagues exemplifies this for me? What is one step I will take to deepen this quality in myself today?

WEEK TWO: The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers



Both the worker and the work itself possess dignity that is unrelated to the perceived status of the job. Workers have both the right and duty to bring claims to their employer or governmental agency when they experience unfair or unjust situations.

Our work is a continuing participation in God's creation, not simply a way of making a living. The economy is intended to serve people, not the other way around. This should be demonstrated in the value given to human labor as well as in the right to leisure and Sabbath.

In the gospel of Matthew (Mt 10:1-14) Jesus speaks of the laborer's right to be paid for his or her work. The assumption is that wages will be fair; paid without bias or prejudice, and yet discrimination in wages, sweat shops, and abuse and harassment of employees are all well documented today. Such injustice is often met with silence, and a quiet, even if unintentional complicity. When I am honest with myself, what do I gain by my own silence? What prevents me from seeing this injustice more clearly – or speaking out? What is one practice I can begin today to express this commitment?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: Deut 5:12-15; James 5:1-6; Genesis 2:1-3; Matt 20:1-16; Luke 12:13-21

What do these readings suggest about the interdependence of meaningful work, Sabbath time, the rights of workers and the social fabric? What do I find most challenging? What is one step I will take to deepen this theme in myself?

WEEK THREE: The Call to Family, Community and Participation



Human persons are social beings living within a variety of circles of association: family, civic community, church, employment, etc. Each of these associations carries with it both rights and duties to participate in mutually responsible ways.

How we organize our society directly impacts human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. People have a right and a duty to seek the common good, in all aspects of society.

Often we claim powerlessness or maintain a safe distance, to avoid coming to grips with what demands our time and attention. Do I avoid getting involved? What explains our unintentional blindness to situations in my family, society or place of work? What is one practice I can begin to change this avoidance?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: Genesis 4:8-15; Deut 5:12-15; John 15:12-17; Acts 2:43-47; Romans 12:4-8

How do these readings remind me I am not the most important person in my universe? That we have been created for one another to love, respect, and care for? Where do I see signs of a thriving community because people are willing to "let go" of a pre-occupation with themselves in favor of a concern for the whole? What is one step I can take to move in this direction?

WEEK FOUR: Care for God's Creation

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The commitment to care for creation is more than a social movement; it is a requirement of our faith. In Genesis, God gave a command to Adam and Eve to care for the diverse and beautiful creation in which they lived.

Humans possess this responsibility not because we are more important than other creatures; rather it is because we have the unique capacity to reason and choose, to safeguard the harmony naturally occurring in creation. Because our choices impact generations coming after us, our decisions must be made not only for the sake of convenience and comfort, but for the future we hold in our hands. Such moral and ethical dimensions call for a consciousness of the whole that underlies Catholic Social Teaching.

How can I become more aware of the impact of my decisions regarding the food I eat, the clothes I buy, the energy I use? What can I

do to nurture my appreciation of the beauty around me and deepen a commitment to protect and preserve it for my children and grandchildren?

What is one practice I can adopt that will nurture my sense of wonder?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Genesis 1:1-31; Leviticus 25:1-7; Daniel 3:56-82; Matt 6:25-34; Matt 6: 25-34*
The countercultural choice to care for an unseen future – and unknown peoples elsewhere on the planet – is not easy. How can we bring real faces and needs into our decision-making about the use of resources? What is one step can I take to learn more about the impact of first world life-styles on the sustainability of Earth's resources?

WEEK FIVE: Rights and Responsibilities

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A healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.

Every person has a fundamental right to life. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. In the encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis reminds us that society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good. As members of society, we too are called to attend, not only to the immediate issues of family and neighborhood, but to the larger issues of society, like climate change, poverty, unemployment and racism. Change begins with individuals taking their responsibility as citizens seriously.

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Leviticus 25:35; Tobit 4:5-11; Jeremiah 29:4-7; Luke 16:19-3; James 2:14-18*

Our faith assumes that we want to be adult believers, willing and able to take responsibility for what we see, for the multiple systemic causes that contribute to local and global tragedies. When do I abdicate responsibility, complaining the situation is too big to address or simply “not my fault”? What is one thing I can do to invest myself in these situations?

WEEK SIX: Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

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In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, the needs of and the participation with people who are poor must be our first consideration.

The preferential option for the poor does not position one group or class against another. Rather it embraces the belief that the deprivation and powerlessness of any one person or group wounds the whole community. The gap between the rich and poor in society is a measure of how far we are from being a true community. The restoration of the dignity and rights of those made poor is an act of justice. What specific contribution can I make to this need?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Ex 22:20-26; Leviticus 19:9-10; Is 58:5-7; Matt 25:34-40; Luke 4:16-21*

One of the challenges of this and the following theme on solidarity is that often we are caught in a feeling of “unfairness” – we believe we have worked hard, we have accomplished something through commitment and education and perseverance – only to hear that we are somehow “to blame” for the poverty of others, people we do not even know and have never met. And yet our faith tells us that we ARE responsible. We are called not only to “do no evil” but to seek out those in need and do good. It is the command to “walk the extra mile,” to lift up the fallen, to share not only our surplus, but our daily bread with the hungry. What concrete step can I take to “bridge the gap”?

WEEK SEVEN: Solidarity

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We are one human family, with all our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are interdependent; our actions and decisions influence every other strand of the web of life in ways that are sacred and powerful.

Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. The vast circle of life depends on each of us being responsible for the other's well-being, keeping one another safe, providing an environment in which Earth – and all her peoples and creatures thrive in sustainable and just ways. How might we enlarge our hearts and our understanding? How might we attend to the anxiety that sometimes arises that we may not have “enough”? What is one step I might take to enlarge my circle of care and ease the anxiety that arises in me?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Zechariah 8:16; Matt 5:21-24; Acts 4:32-35; 1Cor 12:12-26; 1John 3:16-18*

We have often allowed our world to be too small; our family restricted to those close at hand, our community of welcome limited to those who look and think as we do. What challenge do these passages offer me? What one commitment can I make to recognize the abundance that is present rather than any fear of scarcity? What new expressions of generosity can I discover at home, in my family, my communities, and extending this in larger and ever broader circles?