

February 2019

+ Generations of Faith +

FAITH NOTES

+ Enriching, Educating, Engaging All Ages +



Walking the Path of Love:

Catholic Social Teaching & the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” -Luke 4:16-19

Pope Francis reminds us that “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor...’” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 197) What priority do those who experience poverty have in your heart?

As Scripture makes clear, while God accompanies all of us throughout our lives, God is especially close to those of us who are suffering. For example, as the U.S. Bishops remind us, “God’s covenant with ancient Israel included a special concern for poor and vulnerable persons. This concern found expression in their communal laws: laws protecting aliens, widows, and orphans; laws protecting debtors; laws promoting just judgments; laws mandating the gleaning of fields for the benefit of the poor; laws providing for the needs of poor persons from a communal tithe ... When Israel did not live up to the spirit and letter of the law, prophets arose to defend the rights of the poor...”

“Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh?” - Isaiah 58:5-7

The same was true for Jesus: He understood his own mission in special relationship to the suffering ... He fed the hungry, healed the sick, embraced outcasts ... He taught that we will be judged based on how we treat the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society.

Today our Church makes a fundamental option for the poor and vulnerable. Oscar Romero was once asked to explain the meaning of the term, ‘option for the poor’. This is what he said: “I offer you this by way of example. A building is on fire and you’re watching it burn, standing and wondering if everyone is safe. Then someone tells you that your mother and your sister are inside that building. Your attitude changes completely. You’re frantic; your mother and sister are burning and you’d do anything to rescue them even at the cost of getting charred. That’s what it means to be truly committed. If we look at poverty from the outside, as if we’re looking at a fire, that’s not to opt for the poor, no matter how concerned we may be. We should get inside as if our own mother and sister were burning. Indeed it’s Christ who is there, hungry and suffering.”

The Two Feet of Love in Action

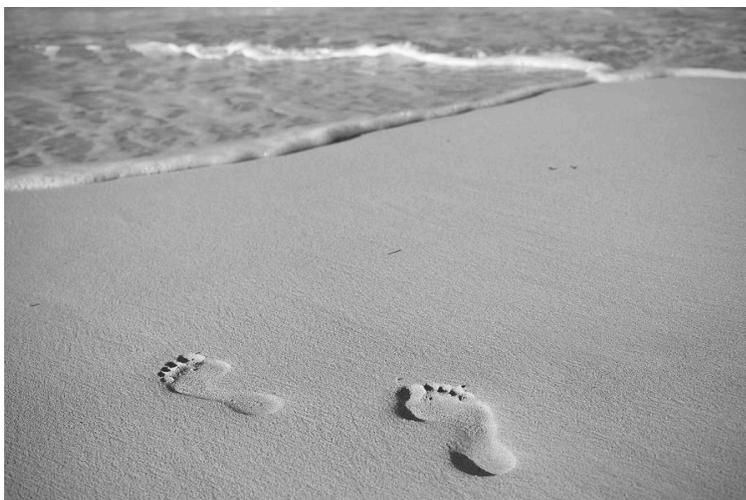
There are two distinct but complementary ways that we can walk the path of love. We call these the “two feet of love in action,” based on Pope Benedict XVI’s reflections in *Deus Caritas Est* (“God is Love”) and *Caritas in Veritate* (“Charity in Truth”)

The First Foot = Social Justice:

Pope Benedict XVI calls this “the primary way of charity,” or love, because: “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just toward them” (*Caritas in Veritate*, #6). We walk with the social justice foot by fostering peace and justice and seeking long-term change in local and global communities. We step with this foot when we work to remove the root causes of problems, when we support the efforts of low-income persons to transform their communities, when we advocate for just public policies, and when we help change the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice at home and around the world.

The Second Foot = Charitable Works:

Pope Francis describes this foot when he emphasizes carrying out works of mercy to help our brothers or sisters who are wounded, hungry, thirsty, naked, or in prison (Homily, 7/3/13). We step with this foot when we work to aid or assist others both locally and globally to meet their immediate, short-term needs. Examples include engaging in direct service or providing food, clothing, shelter, or monetary assistance to help those in need. (Reproduced in part from USCCB “The Two Feet of Love in Action”)





Examination of Conscience

- ✚ What priority do persons who experience poverty and who are vulnerable have in my heart?
- ✚ Do I truly see the poor and vulnerable? Am I tuned in to who and where the poor and vulnerable are in my communities?
- ✚ Do I choose to see life through the eyes of persons who are vulnerable and persons who are experiencing poverty?
- ✚ Do I see Christ in the poor and vulnerable?
- ✚ Do I make efforts to encounter persons who are vulnerable and persons who are experiencing poverty? Do I seek out ways to physically connect and meaningfully engage? Do I look for opportunities to build relationship and community?
- ✚ How do I walk the path of love? Do I step with both the foot of charity and the foot of social justice? Is one foot weaker than the other?

A Closer Look at The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is the only prayer formula attributed to Jesus himself in the Gospels. You'll find it in two places: Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes it as a "summary of the whole Gospel." (CCC, 2761) When understood properly and embraced fully, it is our clearest blueprint for building the kingdom Jesus proclaimed.

Let's take a look at these words:

"Give us this day our daily bread..."

We are asking God to provide for us and make sure we are fed. God, in turn, wants us to care for each other and make sure all are fed. We are God's hands on earth. We pray not only for our needs but the needs of others. We pray that all people will have food to eat and whatever they need to get through the day. And we do our best to help God make this happen.

"The power of God's presence in the world today is precisely at table, in the Eucharist with Jesus. This is why we ask that he feed all of us. Feed us with that spiritual food that strengthens us, at table in the Eucharist, but also feed everyone, in this world in which the reign of hunger is so cruel. When we pray the Our Father, it would be good for us to linger a bit over this petition – 'give us bread today,' to me and to all – and to think about how many people do not have this bread... Pope Benedict XVI, in the encyclical Caritas in Veritate, affirms, 'Feed the hungry is an ethical imperative for the universal Church ... The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights ... It is therefore necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination' (no. 27). Let us not forget the words of Jesus: 'I am the bread of life' (Jn 6:35) and 'If any one thirst let him come to me and drink' (Jn 7:37). These words are a challenge for all of us believers, a challenge to recognize that feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty are a conduit of our relationship with God, a God who has revealed in Jesus his face of mercy." –Pope Francis

