LESSON 4: CARE FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

RESOURCES: CATECHISM AND BIBLE AND USCCB

THE KEY QUESTIONS

WHY DO WE CARE FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE?

KEY POINTS:

OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

From the USCCB:

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no

“I cannot fail to note once again that the poor constitute the modern challenge, especially for the well-off of our planet, where millions of people live in inhuman conditions and many are literally dying of hunger. It is not possible to announce God the Father to these brothers and sisters without taking on the responsibility of building a more just society in the name of Christ.” -Pope John Paul II

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welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."  (Matthew 25: 35-46)

The apostle John takes it further in this passage as he says:

“For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another, unlike Cain who belonged to the evil one and slaughtered his brother. Why did he slaughter him? Because his own works were evil, and those of his brother righteous. Do not be amazed, (then,) brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.” (1 John 3:11-15)

FROM THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF POPE PAUL VI: “ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES”

#23 "If someone who has the riches of this world sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?" It is well known how strong were the words used by the Fathers of the Church to describe the proper attitude of persons who possess anything towards persons in need. To quote Saint Ambrose: "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich". That is, private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute and unconditioned right. No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities. In a word, "according to the traditional doctrine as found in the Fathers of the Church and the great theologians, the right to property must never be exercised to the detriment of the common good". If there should arise a conflict "between acquired private rights and primary community exigencies", it is the responsibility of public authorities "to look for a solution, with the active participation of individuals and social groups". Boom. 😊

CATECHISM REFERENCES CONCERNING CARING FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE
2443 God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them: "Give to him who begs from you, do not refuse him who would borrow from you"; "you received without pay, give without pay." It is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones. When "the poor have the good news preached to them," it is the sign of Christ's presence.

2444 "The Church's love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition." This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to "be able to give to those in need." It extends not only to material poverty but also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty.

2445 Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use:

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you.

2446 St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls this: "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs." The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity:

When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice.

2447 The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.
in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?  

2448 "In its various forms - material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness and death - human misery is the obvious sign of the inherited condition of frailty and need for salvation in which man finds himself as a consequence of original sin. This misery elicited the compassion of Christ the Savior, who willingly took it upon himself and identified himself with the least of his brethren. Hence, those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere."  

2449 Beginning with the Old Testament, all kinds of juridical measures (the jubilee year of forgiveness of debts, prohibition of loans at interest and the keeping of collateral, the obligation to tithe, the daily payment of the day-laborer, the right to glean vines and fields) answer the exhortation of Deuteronomy: "For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in the land.'" Jesus makes these words his own: "The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." In so doing he does not soften the vehemence of former oracles against "buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals . . .," but invites us to recognize his own presence in the poor who are his brethren.  

When her mother reproached her for caring for the poor and the sick at home, St. Rose of Lima said to her: "When we serve the poor and the sick, we serve Jesus. We must not fail to help our neighbors, because in them we serve Jesus."  

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: USE AS MANY OR AS FEW AS YOU WANT. BE PREPARED, BUT LET THE HOLY SPIRIT LEAD THE DISCUSSION.  

1. What does Jesus say about the consequences of how we treat the “least ones” around us?  
2. What’s the importance of Jesus uniting Himself to those “least ones?”  
3. Do you see examples of these “least ones” in your school, job, or family?  
4. What impact, if any, will these words of Jesus have on your relationship with them?  
5. In life sometimes we hesitate to do the right thing because of the social consequences. What does this Scripture say about worrying what others think?
6. What does this scripture tell us about ignoring our brothers and sisters in need?

7. What does it mean to truly “know love?”

8. Does the Church teach that the community is more important than any individual or vice versa?

9. Define “common good.”

10. Is it ok for the true Christian to have property?

11. What does St. Ambrose mean when he says “the world is given to all?”

TAKE HOME MESSAGE:

Everything that we have is not our own, and we as stewards are to share it with those in need!