

Doctrinal Themes: Catholic Social Teaching

Introduction

This segment is designed to help you reflect on the theme of the Social Teachings of the Church. It will also provide some awareness of how *Alive in Christ* integrates the Church's Social Teachings into the curriculum. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting on or journaling the first question. Watch the video *Theological Foundations: Catholic Social Teaching* and note how the explanation sheds light on the topic for your own understanding. Then read the article "Catholic Social Teaching" and answer the reflection questions.

First Question

In what ways does your parish witness to the Social Teaching of the Church?

Video

Watch *Theological Foundations: Catholic Social Teaching* and respond to these questions:

- In what ways did the story of Millie touch you?
- What is your poverty?
- Name one unjust social structure in our world today.
- How would you describe the Catholic understanding of justice?

Article: Catholic Social Teaching

Read the following article and respond to the questions:

“I come to Mass on Sunday to pray, to be spiritually uplifted, to come closer to Jesus in Communion, and receive the grace I need for the coming week. I don’t need political sermons. I’m here for religion, not politics.” — Anonymous Parishioner.

While many Catholics would welcome an application of the Gospel to the pressing political issues of our time, others feel the Church is abandoning its primary purpose when it allows “politics in the pulpit,” even if you dress it up as Catholic Social Teaching. Many feel that the bishops should stick to spiritual concerns and leave politics to the politicians. The dichotomy between faith and justice remains.

Simply put, though, Catholic Social Teaching helps us understand, and put into practice, the two great commandments Jesus proclaimed: love God totally, and love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:25–27).

In the words of Jeremiah, God made it clear that we cannot know God unless we embrace the cause of the poor. Comparing the current king of Israel with the king’s father, Jeremiah tells the new king: “‘Did not your father eat and drink and do justice, and righteousness? Then it was well. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is this not to know me?’ says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 22:15–16)

Knowing God means promoting justice for the poor. Even more directly, Jesus tells us, “...just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” (Matthew 25:45). John seals the deal when he writes, “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Jesus did not give us specific direction on how to address the societal causes of hunger, poverty, war, and other issues of injustice. He did not leave a guide for public policy on these national and global issues in the modern world. This is the realm of Catholic Social Teaching.

In *Alive in Christ*, you will find the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching are presented in seven “Live Your Faith” lessons that can be used at any time during the catechetical year. In addition, each chapter is correlated to the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching. There are also, throughout the sessions, suggestions for students to become involved in acting for justice in very concrete ways.

Reflection Questions

- What most challenged you in this segment?
- What are some issues of social justice in your area in which your students could get involved?