

Session 10



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

PROTECTING THE DIGNITY
OF THE HUMAN PERSON



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

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CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Protecting the Dignity of the Human Person

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his public ministry, Jesus went out of his way to associate with the poor, the suffering, and those most vulnerable in society. He visited their homes, came to their assistance, spoke to them as friends, and brought comfort and healing to them. Jesus identified himself so much with the poor that he said the way we treat the poor directly affects our relationship with him.

In a dramatic scene from Matthew 25, Jesus describes how when we go before the judgment seat of God, the chief criterion he will use to evaluate our lives will be how well we served those in need. Did we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned? Those who fail to help the poor and suffering will be cast into eternal punishment, and Jesus explains why: “As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me” (Matthew 25:45).

This is why Saint Teresa of Calcutta often taught that the Gospel message can be summed up with these five words from Jesus: “You did it to me.” In this session, we are going to go deeper into our consideration of Catholic social teaching, exploring how we have a profound responsibility to care for the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the suffering in the world and in our daily lives. And when we do so, we are loving Jesus, who is present in a special way in the poor.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **Why Catholic social teaching contributes to the flourishing of all peoples, not just Catholics**
- **The difference between rights and responsibilities in society**
- **Why the essential dignity of each human person is at the heart of Catholic social teaching**
- **Why abortion and euthanasia are always morally wrong**
- **What the Church means by a “preferential option for the poor”**
- **How Catholic social teaching inspires the proper attitude toward earthly possessions and social economic relationships**
- **What Catholic social teaching tells us about our economic activity and participation in political life**



OPENING PRAYER

O God, our Creator,
all life is in your hands
from conception until death.
Help us to cherish our children
and to reverence the awesome privilege
of our share in creation.
May all people live and die in dignity and love.
Bless all those who defend the rights of the unborn,
the handicapped and the aged.
Enlighten and be merciful toward those
who fail to love, and give them peace.
Let freedom be tempered by responsibility,
integrity and morality.

*“If you want peace,
work for justice!”*
—Pope Paul VI

—<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=228>

? DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What aspects of Catholic social teaching challenge you the most, and why?
2. Reflect on the following quote from St. Basil the Great:

“The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked. The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor. The acts of charity you do not perform are the injustices you commit.”

How does this quote challenge you to be more aware of the needs of the poor? What is something specific you can do in your own life to be a more generous steward of the goods God has entrusted to you, so you can use them not for yourself but to help others?

3. How does the Catholic view of rights and responsibilities differ from the world’s view?

CALL TO CONVERSION

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25, Jesus tells us that the primary criterion for how God will judge us is how we loved and cared for others. Now imagine that you are going before the judgment seat of God and you see that Jesus is dividing up the people and placing the “sheep” on his right (those who are righteous) and the “goats” on his left (the wicked, who are condemned). You then hear him say to the sheep on the right:

“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... Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:35-36, 40)

Then you hear Jesus say to the goats 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 welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me... Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.” (Matthew 25:41-43, 45)

#1 If you were to go before the judgment seat of God today, which side would you be on?

#2 What changes can you make in your life now to move you even more toward those on the right, who are entering eternal glory?





CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you have probed me, you know me:
you know when I sit and stand;
you understand my thoughts from afar.
You sift through my travels and my rest;
with all my ways you are familiar.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
Lord, you know it all...

You formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.
I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works!
My very self you know.
My bones are not hidden from you.
When I was being made in secret,
fashioned in the depths of the earth,
your eyes saw me unformed;
in your book all are written down;
my days were shaped, before one came to be.

—Psalm 139



SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THE WEEK

Here is a verse from the Bible that you can memorize and reflect on this week to help you apply today's session to your daily life:



“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.’”

—Matthew 25:40

DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
PROTECTING THE DIGNITY
OF THE HUMAN PERSON?

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Where you'll find helpful videos, audio presentations, ebooks, and feature films from the most trustworthy presenters in the Catholic world.

For Further Reading:

For more in-depth reading about Catholic life and dignity of the human person see the following *Catechism* passages:

- *Human Rights: CCC 1928*
- *Preferential Option for the Poor: CCC 1932*
- *Dignity of Human Life: CCC 2258*
- *Opposition to Abortion: CCC 2270–2275*

Other Resources:

- *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 24, 28–29, 31–32, 34*
- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (available online from www.vatican.va)
- *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Encyclical Letters, *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus* by Pope St. John Paul II
- Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate* by Pope Benedict XVI

