

To the Priests and Deacons of Ontario

These homily notes continue the series that began with Trinity Sunday and go to the end of this year. They are issued by the Bishops of Ontario as a help to priests and deacons to make applications of the Social Teaching of the Church from a particular Sunday's Scripture Readings. There is more in these notes than you would want to use in a single homily, but it is hoped that some of the applications would be included in your homily.

26th. SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B) - October 1, 2006

“the wages of the labourers which you kept back, cry out” (II Reading)

1) Today's Readings and the Low Income Poor

1. “The wages of the labourers which you kept back, cry out”
2. ... a strong, vehement denunciation of employers who do not pay the wages they can and should.
3. Surely none of us fall into this category.
4. Yet there are nearly 900,000 workers in Ontario who try to live on low income.
(891,000 – Report of Task Force on Modernizing Income Security, Toronto Summit Alliance, p. 18. Website: www.torontoalliance.ca)
5. These workers do not receive a living family wage sufficient to provide a minimum standard of living for themselves and their dependents – they are living in various degrees of poverty.
6. These low income workers have 350,000 children who live in poverty.
7. In today's Gospel, Jesus states in the strongest possible terms: “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.”
8. These children do not have what they need to be healthy, they suffer hunger. They do not have decent housing. They do not have the opportunities for development most children have. There are more temptations to crime and violence for these children as they see others possessing things they cannot have. They are not able to live cheerful, optimistic lives.
9. A single parent working for minimum wage says: “It means extra expenses when the kids go back to school. They need boots and mitts ... and soon the heating bills will come in. That means my pay cheque will simply not cover everything and I start skipping some meals so my kids can eat. I go to the food bank when I have to, but it's always humiliating. Then there's always something you can't plan for. Like when one of the kids gets sick and I have to buy the medicine.”

2) Whose Responsibility?

1. We may say we are not responsible for this situation. We didn't do anything to cause it. But we are responsible for letting thing go on like this.
2. We are responsible as citizens to work for better conditions for the poor. They are members of our human family. Just as we would give food to someone who is starving, so we have an obligation to help the poor who are suffering from lack of food and who lack the necessities of life.
3. As Pope Paul VI declared, if we profess to love our neighbour, how can we ignore our brothers and sisters who are poor and suffering?
4. Where do our responsibilities lie in improving the condition of the poor? There are several areas to consider.
5. First of all, our competitive market economy is to blame. But we all have a hand in shaping our economy, some of course much more powerfully than others.
6. In order to cut costs and make a profit, many employers do not pay a living family wage. Many small business employers say they cannot pay a higher wage because their profit margin is too narrow.
7. (Unable to pay a living wage?) For some, to pay a higher wage would mean they could not compete with other businesses paying a lower wage whose costs would be lower.
8. In such a situation, they would not be obliged to pay a higher wage if it meant so little profit they would go out of business. However they are obliged to try to cut their costs in other ways in order to pay a living wage.
9. They are obliged to work with other businesses, unions, government, and their own workers to change things. For instance, employers, (farmers too) need to band together to bring about a fair deal and reasonable prices from their suppliers.
10. A business can cut costs if employer and workers work together to improve efficiency and productivity in the business.
11. For example, we have a company that wanted to pay a living wage but couldn't because their profit margin was too low. Mindful of their responsibility to pay a living wage, they got management and employees all working together to improve efficiency in their manufacturing process. (Reell Precision Manufacturing Co., St. Paul, Minn. – "America" mag. 27/5/2000)
Together they made a number of improvements: a more efficient assembly line, less need of supervision and quality control because employees became more responsible for this, less waste, less absenteeism. Employees and management felt they were part of a team working for the good of all. They achieved reductions in costs and increased productivity that made it possible to pay a living wage.
12. Any business can become more cost effective if management and workers look upon themselves as a team, understanding the way the business works, each one sharing in responsibility for the good of the business, the good of them all.

3) What is a Living Wage?

1. Sufficient income is a human right belonging to everyone. Everyone has a right to a portion of the earth's goods, sufficient for the needs of self and family.
2. The obligation to pay a living family wage has long been a requirement of our Church's teaching on social matters. Pope Leo dealt with this in 1891 when he deplored the miserable condition of the working class.
3. A living family wage is a wage sufficient to maintain a family and allow it to live decently. (Cat. of the Cath. Ch. 2434, Compendium of Soc. Doct. 1250)
This means enough income to provide for food, housing, clothing, hygiene and health needs, transportation, and the other minimum requirements for life today.
4. Statistics Canada states that a family of two requires at least \$20,000 a year for an adequate income; a family of three requires \$25,000.
5. The current minimum wage is \$7.75 an hour. This works out to \$15,500 a year if the worker is able to work for 40 hours a week for fifty weeks. However the average working week for low income workers is 32 hours, - \$12,400 for 50 weeks. Many low paid workers cannot get 40 hours of work a week. Employers hire them on a part time basis and avoid paying the benefits that go with a full time job
6. To earn \$20,000 a year, the minimum amount for a living wage for a family of two, requires a minimum wage of \$10 an hour.

4) Political Action

1. For years now many social organizations and groups have been requesting the Ontario Government to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour.
2. The Ontario Government has paid little attention to the needs of the poor beyond raising the welfare rates by a paltry 3%. The Minimum Wage will be raised to \$8.00 an hour next year.
3. It appears that the poor as a voting bloc do not rate much attention from the Government.
4. It is up to us as concerned citizens and as Christians who want the poor looked after, to raise our voices in protest to the government. We also need to work with others, in organizations or groups, to better conditions for the poor.

5) Conclusion

1. In our First reading Moses says: " would that all the Lord's people were prophets", people who speak out against injustice and act for the good of others as God wants.
2. This is what God is telling us today, that he is calling us to take an active part in public and political life for the good of all, the common good.
3. As we renew our Covenant with God in this Mass, let us offer ourselves with Jesus that he may strengthen us to work for justice for the poor with whom he identified himself: " I was hungry and you gave me to eat".