

Are we aware of what the Spirit is saying to us through our Popes?

Jesus said to Peter and the apostles: “He who hears you, hears me.”

The Popes are the successors of Peter whom Jesus has placed in charge of the Church.

They continue to govern and lead the Church and Jesus continues to speak through them. Jesus guides them through the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth.

1) The Holy Spirit Guides Us and Strengthens Us to Deal with the Problems of Our Time

1. The Spirit of Truth, speaking through the Holy Father to the whole Church, gives us guidance in dealing with the injustices and evil in our economic, political, cultural and social systems.

2. In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us: “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you” Advocate means Supporter. The Holy Spirit will be another Supporter besides Jesus. The Holy Spirit worked in Jesus in his life on earth, enlightening him, directing him, strengthening him, giving him courage. Now the Holy Spirit will carry on in us what he did in Jesus.

3. The Holy Spirit will make us able to speak the truth of the Church’s Social Doctrine in dealing with today’s social evils. He will make the Pope, bishops and all of us speak adequately and with truth in dealing with the scandal of sex abuse that hangs like a dark cloud over the Church.

3. But before we speak specifically of what we can do in these areas, we need to be aware of how the Spirit will strengthen us and give us courage to act for social justice, for the upholding of human dignity, and for the social love that should unite people. We may be afraid to speak out for justice, reforms and human decency, truth and goodness. The Holy Spirit will be our advocate to support us.

4. Through his Death and Resurrection Jesus has brought us the Holy Spirit so we can live in God and have God living in us: Jesus said: “you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” With Jesus in us, we can face all threats and opposition. Jesus says: “I have overcome the world”, the world of deceit and trickery and abuse.

2) The Spirit Makes Us Able to Love with the Love of Jesus

1. “No legislation, no system of rules or negotiation will ever succeed in persuading men and peoples to live in unity, brotherhood and peace; no line of reasoning will ever be able to surpass the appeal of love. Love is a force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today’s world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations, legal systems from within. It is an indispensable act of love to strive to organize and structure society so that one’s neighbour will not find himself in poverty.” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 207,208)

2. Pope Benedict echoes this statement in his last encyclical, “Charity in Truth”: “Love is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. Love is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from divine love. Divine love is the principal of relationships within family members but also of social, economic and political relationships.... Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to society: the common good. It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. ... The more we strive to secure the common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more

effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity.” (Charity in Truth: 1 – 2, 6)

3. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love with the love of Jesus, the love needed to deal with social problems, since Jesus is living in us through the Spirit. As we experience the power of the Spirit in our work for the common good, we will know that he is in us. The Holy Spirit will give us confidence, hope and courage.

3) Jesus Wants Us To Love Everyone With His Love

1. Jesus says to us today: “The one who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me.” He was speaking especially of his new commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

2. The way we give witness to the presence of Jesus within us is by our love for one another. Jesus said: “By this will all men know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

3. We keep the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbour as ourselves by applying the Church’s social doctrine. This doctrine teaches us how to love our neighbour through the relationships and structures of social life.

4. Pope John Paul stated in his encyclical “Social Concerns of the Church”: “God created us to live in solidarity. This means to live in union with one another, supporting one another, committed to the common good, the good of all and each individual, because we are all responsible for all.”(38)

This is the way we practice social love. If our parish is like this, we will attract people to it, especially those who have strayed away, or youth who have stopped going to Mass.

4) Salvation Through Our Work In This World

1. In his pastoral letter to the Church, “On Christian Hope”, Pope Benedict says: “modern Christianity has to a large extent restricted its attention to the individual and his salvation. But our relationship with God is established through our communion with Jesus, and this relationship is with the one who gave himself as a ransom for all. Being in communion with Jesus draws us into his “being for all.” (28) If we are committed to Jesus, we are committed to live for others. So we don’t “save our souls” by withdrawing from the world. We save our souls by engaging with our fellow members of the Church and society to make this world a better place.

2. As the Popes have exhorted, Catholics are called to play their part in social, economic and political life, to establish a social order governed by social justice and social love which reveals the presence of God in our world structure and lifts billions of people out of poverty and oppression.

3. We need to study the Social Doctrine of the Church and act upon it, especially Pope Benedict’s last encyclical “Caritas in Veritate”, (Charity in Truth), on how charity (love) is the basis of the Church’s Social Teaching. Also our Canadian Bishops have recently issued a letter entitled “Central Themes in Recent Church Teaching on the Environment”.

5) Practicing the Virtues of Social Justice and Social Love

1. The virtue of social justice means that we are all obliged to work with others to make the systems and practices of social, economic and political life conform to the common good, the good of each and everyone of us.

2. The virtue of social love (social charity) means that we are all obliged to work with others

to have mutual respect, harmony and unity in all our social relationships, between all our groups.

3. The practice of these virtues requires working with others in solidarity to bring about change so there is solidarity for all. It requires group action, organizing with others, perhaps only a few to begin with. “Most of the problems afflicting the various peoples of our continent have their origin in socioeconomic causes, which can be overcome if each person or group – including nations – applies the principle of solidarity” (Synod for the Church in America). We can see the power of solidarity in the way that labour unions and cooperatives have bettered the condition of workers.

4. The practice of these virtues begins in our families. Members of the family must work together to make things good for all in the family, to have mutual respect and mutual care reign in the family, so that all its members are united in mutual love.

5. As they experience this in their families, our young people will be formed to work with others for the common good of each and every member of society, for social justice and social love.

Our faith, truly understood, calls us to responsibility for others.

6. Jesus says that this will be the basis of our Judgment: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat. ... Enter into the home of your Father” (Matthew 25)

6) Our Mass

1 In the Mass, the human elements of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

2. Jesus wants to transform us by bringing us into himself, to be united as one in him, working with others to make his presence, his love felt in our families, our parish, our workplaces, in our society.

3. Let us offer ourselves with Jesus, as he becomes present in our Eucharistic Prayer, and receive his saving power to work for social justice and social love.