

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: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive ... You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in 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, and 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, for 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.” (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.

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 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 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.

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.

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 and 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. 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. Let us offer ourselves with Jesus for this.
2. Love conquers all things (1Cor. 13:1-13). The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love with the love of Jesus, since Jesus is living in us through the Spirit. The Spirit will bring us confidence, hope and courage. As we experience the power of the Spirit, we will know the Spirit, and know that he is in us.

3) Jesus Wants Us to Love Everyone with His Love

1. Jesus says to us today: “Whoever loves me, will keep my word (my commandments).”
2. The commandments that Jesus is talking about are not just the Ten Commandments. Jesus is calling us to believe in him and to trust in him, and most of all, to keep his new commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you”
3. 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.” This is a love that is open to everyone, reaching out to all, the love of Jesus that we want to share with everyone, especially the poor and needy.
4. This is the way parishes are called to be and to act. Think about how you as a parish “love one another” and express this.

4) Salvation Through Our Work In This World

1. In his pastoral letter to the Church, “Our Hope of Salvation”, Pope Benedict says that “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.” Jesus commits us to live for others. The love of God is revealed in our responsibility for others.”
2. So we don’t save our souls by withdrawing from this world. We save our souls by engaging with our fellow members of the Church and society to make this world a better place and by helping the poor and needy to have a better life, as the Saints have so gloriously shown us.
3. The reconstruction of the social order in our world now, as the Popes have so long been calling for, is not some temporal thing that doesn’t matter. It has a critical part to play if people are to find the presence of God in our present world structure and billions of people lifted out of poverty and oppression.
4. Therefore, again as the Popes have exhorted, Catholics are called to play their part in economic and political life, to establish a social order governed by social justice and social love.
5. Many Catholics, both clergy and lay, have not been listening to the Popes, have not been heeding their message in their pastoral letters or encyclicals. We need to study the Social Doctrine of the Church and act upon it. A first step is to form a social justice study/action group in our parishes. A great deal of material on the Social Doctrine of the Church is available on the Internet. Look up Catholic Social Teaching on the search engine of your computer.

5) Practicing the Virtues of Social Justice and Social Love.

1. The way that the reconstruction of the social order will come about is by the practice of the virtues of social justice and social love.

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

3. The virtue of social love, or social charity, means that we are all obliged to work with others for mutual respect, harmony and unity in all our social relationships, in all our groups.

4. The practice of these virtues requires working with others to bring about change, to work in and for solidarity. 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” (Special Synod for America).

We can see the power of solidarity in the way that labour unions and cooperatives have bettered the condition of workers.

5. 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 make mutual respect and mutual care reign in the family, so that all members are united in mutual love.

6. 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 what each one deserves in justice and social love. What is it like in your family?

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

8. Jesus sums it all up in the Last Judgment scene he gives us in Matthew’s Gospel:

“I was hungry and you gave me to eat ... enter into the home of your Father.”

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 his body on earth now, united as one in him, working with others to make his presence and 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 for social justice and social love.