

THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

We tend to look at the Sunday Scripture Readings in an individualistic way: how does this Reading apply to “me and God”, or to my relations with another individual. We are living in a culture of individualism which stems back to the individualism that began long centuries ago. The Church as a people has been shaped by this individualism and it has shown itself in our preaching, which has focused on the individual’s practice of the faith: “go to Mass and the sacraments, keep the Ten Commandments”. The Vatican Council has restored a communal perspective to us with its emphasis on the People of God bound together on a heavenly journey, a community of faith expressed in our celebration of Mass as a community.

When we look at the Sunday Scripture Readings from a social perspective – what is this passage saying about the relationship of my people with each other, with people at work or in the community, with all our brothers and sisters of the Church, and with the whole human race – we begin to see applications that we have overlooked before. Father Walter Burghardt says: “Of all the demands on preachers, none is more urgent today than a persuasive presentation of biblical justice. Without the biblical justice that is fidelity to the relationships imposed by God in Jesus Christ, any and every claim to love God is itself a mockery. The need? Courage to touch the Gospel to relationships that divide the human family: poverty, racism, homelessness, unemployment, abuse, the list is legion.”

At their Plenary Meeting held in April 2006, the Ontario Bishops discussed the need to promote the Social Teaching of the Church. The Bishops decided to encourage their priests and deacons to make applications in their homilies to the Church’s Social Teaching where the Sunday Scripture Readings pointed to these. In this way the integrity of the Readings would be upheld and the social message of the Church would reach most of our people. The Bishops also decided that homily notes to aid in this preaching would be sent to them and that they would distribute these to their clergy. Seven sets of Homily Notes were sent to the Bishops last year by the OCCB Social Affairs Commission to distribute. For this year it was decided to put the Homily Notes on the website of the OCCB for wider distribution and easy access.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states: “Her social doctrine pertains to the Church’s evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour. This is not a marginal interest or activity, or one that is tacked on to the Church’s mission, rather it is at the heart of the Church’s ministry of service.” (Compendium 67)

We have a duty then and a responsibility to give our people the social message of the Church.

Bishop Fabbro of London wrote “ ... of the importance of the Sunday homily in deepening our people’s understanding and appreciation of this teaching. Our preaching of the Gospel helps them to open their hearts to hear the cry of the poor. It moves them to act for justice and to announce to the world the transforming power of Christ’s grace by their words and by the example of their lives.”

(To the Priests and Deacons of the Diocese of London, June 2, 2006)

It is hoped that these Notes will assist the priests and deacons of Ontario to apply the Social Teaching of the Church in their homilies where the Sunday Scripture Readings warrant this.

As a transition from our homily to the Eucharistic offering, we can speak of how the Eucharist calls us to work for social justice and social charity.

We renew our Covenant with God in every Mass. Our Covenant calls us to have the right relationship with God, our fellow human beings, and with the earth and environment which God has entrusted to us. This is the meaning of Biblical justice. The more our people understand this, the more they will leave Mass with a sense of mission to work together for Christ’s Kingdom of justice, love and peace.

We can express this in such words as:

“Jesus comes now in the Eucharist to renew and strengthen our Covenant bond with him.

Our Covenant with God calls us to have the right relationship with God our Father, with each other,

and with the earth, to work together for justice, love and peace in our world.

Offer yourself with Jesus to be renewed and strengthened in your bond with him, with each other, with all your groups, and in your care for the earth.

Jesus established our Covenant in his Blood: ‘this is the cup of my blood of the new covenant’.”

You can vary these words from Sunday to Sunday.