



CHURCH OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

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March 11, 2007
Third Sunday in Lent

The Best Kept Secret

The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the women and men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way oppressed, these are the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the followers of Christ.

- Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World Second Vatican Council)



The Catholic Church's long history of advocacy for the poor, for adequate housing, the right of workers to a just wage and to form unions and bargain collectively, the stance against war and capital punishment, is often unknown even to practicing Catholics. Everyone in the world, it seems, knows where the Church stands on sexual and gender issues: divorce, contraception, abortion, homosexuality, but often the same people who champion Church teaching on these issues are ignorant of or conveniently ignore the Church's clear teaching on issues of justice, teaching which comes to us from the Gospels. Some (not all) of the very people who say the rosary in front of Planned Parenthood sites will immediately complain that a priest – or even the Pope – should “stay out of politics” when he preaches against war or against capital punishment; yet these are also life issues. The 1971 Synod of Catholic Bishops declared that without work for justice we do not have true Gospel living. Cardinal Bernadin of happy memory put it best when he spoke of the “*Seamless Garment of Life*.” As Catholic Christians we must be in favor of life both before and after birth. The Catechism of the Catholic Church declares that “*society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow organizations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to nature and their vocation. Social Justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.*” (#1928)

The Church's social teaching in the modern period dates from 1891, when Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum (The Condition of Labor)* spoke out against the inhuman conditions which were the normal plight of working people in industrial societies. In 1931, on the fortieth anniversary of this encyclical, Pope Pius XI wrote the next major social encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno (The Reconstruction of the Social Order.)* Writing in the midst of a severe, world-wide, economic depression, the Pope called for the reconstruction of the social order according to the principles of *Rerum Novarum* and reaffirmed the right and duty of the Church to address social issues. During World War II, Pope Pius XII wrote several “Christmas Messages” in which he outlined the just international order necessary for global peace. He encouraged the cooperation which has resulted in the long-standing commitment of strong support given to the UN by the Church's social teaching.

Thirty years after Pope Pius XI's great letter, Pope John XXIII wrote two major encyclical letters on the central issues of his day. In *Mater et Magistra (Christianity and Social Progress, 1961)* and *Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth, 1963)*, Pope John set forth a number of principles to guide both Christians and policy-makers in addressing the gap between rich and poor nations and the threats to world peace. A major contribution of John XXIII was his emphasis in *Pacem in Terris* on social and economic rights and not just on legal and political rights. The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John in 1962, continued and brought to a close by Pope Paul VI, in the Constitution on *The Church in the Modern World*, affirmed that the specifically religious mission of the Church gave it “*a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law.*” Since then, statements by Pope Paul VI, and Pope John Paul II, by Synods of Bishops, and by regional and national Conferences of

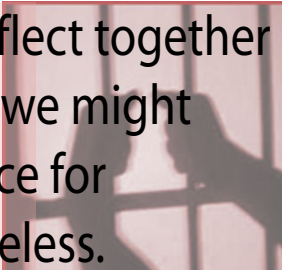
Bishops have both reiterated and reinforced this position. The strong link between the Gospel and social justice was emphasized repeatedly by Pope John Paul II. His most important social teaching came in the encyclical, *Laborem Exercens (On Human Work, 1981)*. In that encyclical, the Pope emphasized “the priority of labor over capital” as central to the just society. Again in 1991, the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul issued an encyclical, *Centesimus Annus (One Hundred Years)*, which states that the spread of Catholic social teaching itself is an “essential” part of the Church’s missionary activity. Bishops in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have echoed this “preferential option for the poor.”

In the United States, the Bishops have taken the call to justice very seriously, most particularly in their pastoral letters; *Brothers and Sisters to Us (1979)*, which addressed the evil of racism, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response (1983)*, which reiterated strongly the need to build the structures of peace, and challenged the Reagan Administration’s defense policy. Unemployment, poverty, agriculture, and global interdependence were treated in *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy (1986)*. The option for the poor again came up in *To the Ends of the Earth (1986)* when the Bishops spoke of a holistic approach to mission, one which necessarily includes liberation. Most recently, the Bishops clarified the Church’s position on homosexuality, insisting on justice for homosexual persons (*Always Our Children.*) According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “the Church teaches that social justice is an integral part of evangelization, a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel, and an essential part of the Church’s mission.” (*Communities of Salt and Light, 1993*)

So it is clear that for Christians to say they don’t have time for social justice is like saying they don’t have time to attend church, read the Bible, or pray. Here at St. Ignatius, with our Jesuit history and charism, we have the added imperative to justice in the decrees of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, which declared the constitutive nature of work for justice in all Jesuit Ministries. In urging Jesuits to engage in justice work, Very Rev. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., Father General of the Society, also reminded them that engaging with the poor would cause some of them to be killed, and that has happened throughout the world, most notably in the assassination of six Jesuit Professors at the University of Central America in El Salvador.

Many of our parishioners already work for justice through our Ignatian Social Justice group. Parishioners advocate on behalf of affordable housing, children in need, and detained asylum seekers. Others work and lobby for peace through Pax Christi. On Saturday, March 24, we will host the first East Side Vicariate Justice Day, bringing together parishioners from all the Catholic Churches on the East Side of Manhattan, to learn more about the issues of our city, country and world in the light of Catholic Social Justice and to reflect together on how we might be a voice for the voiceless. This will be an exciting day! Margaret O’Brien Steinfelds, former editor of *Commonweal* magazine and current co-director of the Fordham *Center on Religion and Culture* will give the keynote address on the history of Catholic Social Justice in the Archdiocese of New York, and people like Cathy Brown of Catholic Relief Services, Mary Ann Muller of Pax Christi, George Horton of Catholic Charities, Dr. Marilyn Martone of St. John’s University, Sister Camille D’Arienzo, founder of the Cherish Life Circles, Rev. Mark Hallinan, S.J., from the New York Province Social Ministries Office of the Society of Jesus, and our own Ignatian Social Justice members will be leading breakout workshops on various social justice issues. It will be a historic occasion for the East Side and we hope you will join us. Please see the enclosed flyer for more information and to register.

“Social Justice is really about living a life that reflects the model of Jesus. It is about those actions that reveal who we really are. Being a follower of Jesus means taking his teachings seriously. It is not enough to call Jesus “Savior” if our treatment of others is unjust.... If we talk the talk without walking the walk we do injury to the Gospel.” (*Go and Do Likewise*, 23rd Publications, 2006) Jesus was asked, “What must we do to inherit eternal life?” He answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27) We are to love God and the dear neighbor without distinction. Come to St. Ignatius on March 24 to see how best you can do this.



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Mary Naughton, Pastoral Associate