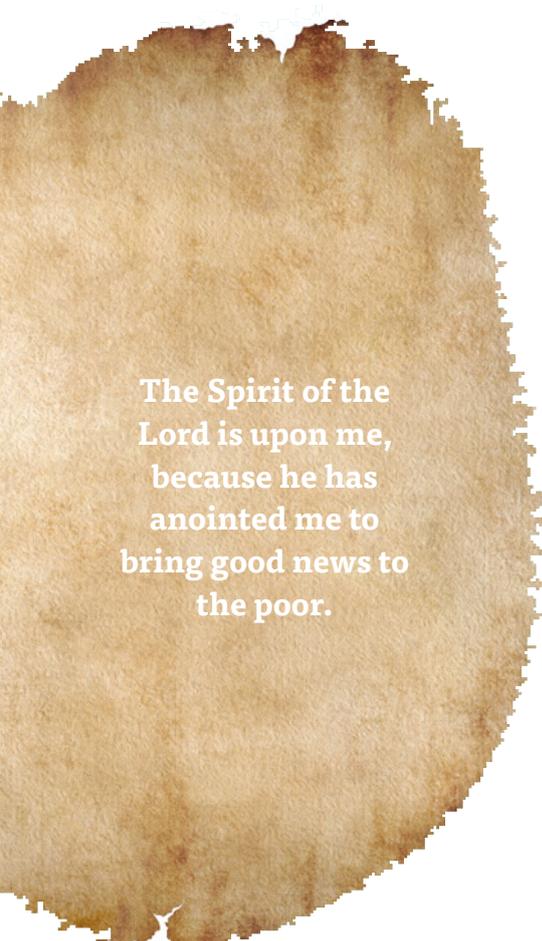




The liberating mission of Jesus

Luke 4:16-30

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.'



The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

For Christians the call to faith and its consequences provide a foundation for living rooted in the liberating mission of Jesus. Discipleship is greater than a 'Jesus and me' relationship; it entails both 'call', being drawn to Jesus, and 'response', being sent in mission. Radical discipleship calls for deep commitment and a movement beyond one's comfort zone to an encounter with marginalised people and broken lives. In so doing it invokes the potential for personal transformation – the call to discipleship is almost always disturbing, both to the individual and the status quo.

From the time of the early Christians a call to discipleship has led to a reorientation – a turning away from certain attitudes and turning towards Jesus and his teaching. Jesus did not love people in general but people in particular and he undertook his ministry through encountering specific people and the stories of their lives, inviting them to transformation and liberation.

Jesus was profoundly imbued with the sentiments of the Hebrew Scriptures which he read and studied, and the message of the prophets was central to his ministry, as seen in Luke 4:16-18. The Last Judgement scene of Matthew's gospel (Mt 25:31-46) echoes the Old Testament belief that God is intensely concerned with the wellbeing of the poor and marginalised, so much so that Jesus declares that whatever we do to the poor, we do to him. Our neglect of the needy is something he takes personally.

Jesus chose to be an outsider, identifying with other outsiders without neglecting the people of Israel. At the same time he was neither uncritical nor impartial; his partiality extended intentionally to every person or class excluded by the establishment – this was the heart of the liberating mission of Jesus. He rejected the type of religiosity that ignored social responsibility and the plight of the distressed, unmasking the lie that hierarchy was part of the 'Divine Plan' and calling for a social and religious revolution. Hence, true Christianity in the image of Jesus will always be countercultural. Jesus disturbed the status quo and challenged the complacent. His ministry was unexpected as he dismissed the notion that some people are more worthy than others. In essence, his message was one of unification and reconciliation, outreach and inclusion.

Through the mission and ministry of Jesus we do not have a blueprint or manual of how to build a perfect society. Rather, we are called to seriously consider his words and deeds and to use our energies to work out how we might truly care for others. Catholic Social Teaching provides us with a map for navigating this path. Broadly speaking, Catholic Social Teaching sums up the teachings of the Church on social justice issues. It promotes a vision of a just society that is grounded in the Bible and in the wisdom gathered from experience by the Christian community as it has responded to social justice issues through history.



The four core principles of Catholic Social Teaching are:

Human Dignity

We believe that every person is made in God's image, every person has inherent dignity and every life is sacred. The innate dignity of each person is the foundation and inspiration of our vision for a just and compassionate world. We see the image of God in every person, no matter their circumstance.

The women, men and children most vulnerable to extreme poverty and injustice should not be hindered from living a life equal to their dignity.

The Common Good

We believe that humans are not only sacred but social, and that we experience the fullness of life in our relationships with others. Working towards the common good requires a commitment from each of us to respect the rights and responsibilities of all people. We believe every person is entitled to share in society's resources. Every person is also responsible for sharing our society's resources – the common good - with others. This extends beyond our personal interests, and beyond national borders, to our one global human family.

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Solidarity

Solidarity requires that we see another person as a neighbour, a fellow human who is equal in dignity.

Solidarity means recognising the responsibilities we have to each other, and taking an active role in helping others attain their full potential. This is more than just a feeling. It drives us to action. We are called by the principle of solidarity to take the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) to heart, and to express this understanding in how we live and interact with others, not as a matter of charity, but of justice. Solidarity makes it impossible for us to look away from the injustices that our sisters and brothers experience.

Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity means that all people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. These decisions should be made at the appropriate level, by the people most affected by the decision.

It also means that those in positions of authority have the responsibility to listen to everyone's voice, and make decisions according to the common good. Partnerships and collaboration amongst groups, including all levels of government and social institutions, are necessary to work toward a shared, unified vision for society.

Out of the four core principles flow the principles of the Preferential Option for the Poor, Participation, Economic Justice and Care for our Common Home, among others. These principles are responsive to particular social issues such as poverty and inequality, the right to work, and environmental degradation.

*Loving God,
lead us beyond ourselves
to care and protect
to nourish and shape
to challenge and energize
both the life and the world
You have given us.*

*God of light and God of darkness,
God of conscience and God of courage
lead us through this time
of spiritual confusion and public
uncertainty.*

*Lead us beyond fear, apathy and
defensiveness
to new hope in You and to hearts full
of faith.*

Joan Chittister osb

