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The Moral Struggle of a New Age

God has created every person in his image and likeness. That dignity is at the heart of issues of morality and justice. Through statements from the Pope and the bishops, the Church reminds us that Catholics are to bring a respect for human dignity to the way they approach the world's problems. The arms race and war, poverty and hunger, and family life and life in society are all important concerns for Catholics.

Activity

At Kevin's school, the special needs students attended some classes with the other students. During gym class, Kevin noticed that some students made fun of Tim, one of the special needs students. They tricked him into doing things that got him into trouble. Kevin spoke up on Tim's behalf and became the target of ridicule himself.

Kevin accepted the consequences of pointing out to others that what was happening to Tim was wrong. Often, standing up for what we know is right means putting ourselves out on the line, just as Kevin did. When have you spoken up and defended someone's dignity?

Do one of the following.

1. Choose a public issue that is important to you. Ask your friends to join you in writing to government representatives requesting legislative support that defends and protects the dignity of the human beings involved in this issue.
2. Meet with your family to decide how you can all support the Special Olympics through volunteering or becoming involved in other ways.



Trivia

Church History

Social Studies

Arts & Culture

People & Places

The basilica of St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, Quebec, is one of the most-visited pilgrimage sites in North America. The inside of the oratory is lined with crutches that testify to the healing power of Blessed Andre Bessette, who founded the oratory and whose tomb is on oratory grounds.

Quotable Scripture

"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called
children of God."

—Matthew 5:9

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✚ Scripture Background

In the Time of Jesus

The Passover Meal The Jewish Passover commemorates the freeing of the Israelites from Egypt. The name *Passover* comes from the Scripture passage “I will pass over you; . . . no destructive blow will come upon you” (Exodus 12:13). Passover was and is the Jewish festival of freedom and redemption. The Last Supper celebrated by Jesus and his disciples was a Passover meal. But Jesus gave Passover a new meaning offering up his Body and Blood—setting us free from slavery to sin, achieving our Redemption so we might have eternal life in Heaven.

Read an account of Jesus’ last Passover meal, the Last Supper, in Matthew 26:17–30, Mark 14:2–26, or Luke 22:7–20.

WEEKLY PLANNER

On Sunday

At Mass, listen for prayers about justice for the poor or about peace among nations. Silently add your own prayers for people who need help in your community.

On the Web

blestarewe.com



Visit our Web site for the saint of the day and the reflection question of the week.

Saint of the Week



Saint Anne

(1st century B.C.)

According to legend, Anne and her husband, Joachim, prayed to God for many years for a child. An angel appeared to Anne and told her she would have a child who would be blessed by the world. Anne gave birth to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Patron Saint of: Quebec, grandparents

Feast Day: July 26



A Prayer for the Week

Lord, open our eyes to people who are poor and suffering and help us see your presence in their midst. Teach us to share our blessings with those in need. Amen.

19 The Moral Struggle of a New Age



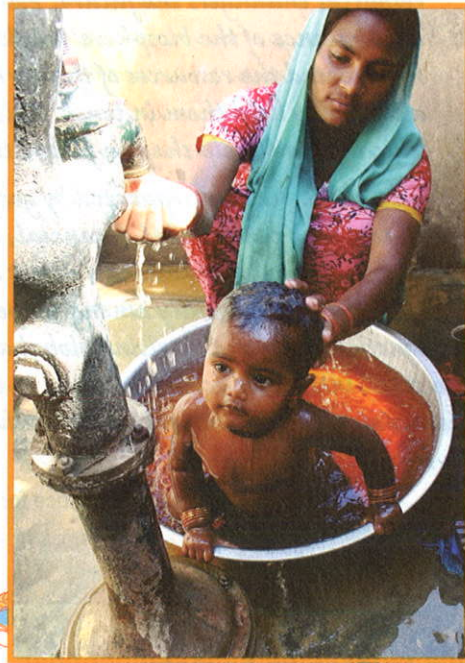
If anyone is in need, do not turn away from them.
Freely and generously help them meet their need.

Based on Deuteronomy 15:7-8

Share

People in developed nations are accustomed to having boundless resources—such as water, fuel to power their cars and warm their homes, and nutritious food that is available in abundance. For most of us living in wealthy nations, it is hard to imagine a lifestyle where sanitary drinking water is a rare luxury, where few people can even dream of owning a car, and where meals often consist of little more than a bowl of rice or mashed cornmeal.

People in prosperous nations must strive to share the Earth's resources with their less wealthy neighbors living in poor nations. It is a matter of justice for all people to have what they need to survive and live in dignity.



Activity

List five ways in which people in our country can consume fewer of the world's resources.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

What are some social problems?

Hear & Believe



Witness Moral Challenges for the Church

All people on this globe share a common ecological environment that is under increasing pressure. Depletion of soil, water, and other natural resources endangers the future. Pollution of air and water threatens the delicate balance of the biosphere on which future generations will depend. God has created the resources of the earth for the benefit of all, and we who are alive today hold them in trust. This is a challenge to develop a new ecological ethic that will help shape a future that is both just and sustainable.

In short, nations separated by geography, culture, and ideology are linked in a complex commercial, financial, technological, and environmental network. These links have two direct consequences. First, they create hope for a new form of community among all peoples, one built on dignity, solidarity, and justice. Second, this rising global awareness calls for greater attention to the stark inequities across countries in the standard of living and control of resources. We must not look at the welfare of U.S. citizens as the only good to be sought.

From Economic Justice for All, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Seeking Justice in Society

In the 1986 in their **pastoral letter** *Economic Justice for All*, part of which you just read, the bishops in the United States wrote about Catholic **social teaching** and the economy in the United States. The bishops reminded us that we are required to use our resources wisely, keeping in mind that God intended them for the good of all his people.

Earlier, in 1965, Pope Paul VI explained the importance of meeting this same challenge to the bishops gathered at Vatican Council II. In the document *Gaudium et Spes*, or “Joy and Hope,” the Church teaches, “God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity” (69). When wealth, land, and other natural resources are not distributed fairly, hunger, poverty, oppression, and suffering result.

The Catholic Church’s social teachings are based on Jesus’ own teachings and example and on God’s law. Selfishly using or wasting wealth and other resources at the expense of other people violates the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not steal.”

Teaching and promoting **social justice** is always a concern for Church leaders, especially the Pope. Writing an **encyclical** is one way that the Pope teaches about social justice. An encyclical is a letter from the Pope to all the members of the Church. In 1963 Pope John XXIII wrote the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, or “Peace on Earth.” In this encyclical, he explained that all Christians are called to be in solidarity with the poor. If our neighbors lack food, clothing, shelter, medicine, or education, we are obligated to help them. Alleviating the hardships faced by the poor is a work of social justice pleasing to God.

Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, “The Gospel of Life,” addresses our responsibility to protect and promote the dignity of every human life. John Paul II pointed out that some nations cannot meet the needs of their large populations. They often encourage anti-birth measures, such as abortion, to control their populations. These actions, however, are morally evil because they do not respect human life. John Paul II also taught about the responsibility of richer nations to share their resources and help underdeveloped nations. Pope John Paul II said that we must “solve

these serious problems with respect for the dignity of individuals and families and for every person's inviolable right to life."

Catholics can help meet these challenges by connecting the work of the parish community to the local, national, or international community. Protecting the environment is one way to make a difference in promoting social justice.

Justice for Our Neighbors

Since the first missionaries set foot in the New World in the sixteenth century, the Catholic faith has dominated the religious landscape of Latin America. Today, about 90 percent of Latin America's half-billion people are Catholic. Despite this widespread faith, people in the region, which includes Mexico and Central and South America, continue to suffer. In most of Latin America, where the average worker earns only several hundred dollars a year, a wide gulf separates the wealthy from the rest of the population. Many people lack the ability to meet the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, and education.

Catholic laypeople, religious, and clergy have long been active in working for the rights of the poor in Latin America. In the sixteenth century, Bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas, who we first learned about in chapter 14, spoke out against the

way Spanish Conquistadors treated the Mayan Indians. Today many laypeople in the Church in Latin American are taking on a greater role in the Church's mission of social justice and working among poor people.

Activity

Poverty and injustice are easy to ignore when you do not see their effects every day. How can Catholics become more aware of others' needs, both here and abroad? Discuss this with a small group.

Faith Words

pastoral letter A pastoral letter is a message from a bishop or bishops giving guidance to the members of the Church or society.

social teaching The social teachings of the Catholic Church are based on the respect for human dignity, human solidarity, and the principles of justice and peace.

encyclical An encyclical is a pastoral letter from the Pope to the whole Church and even the world in which the Pope clarifies or reinforces Catholic teachings.



How do we work for social justice?

Hear & Believe

Making a Difference

The Church's teachings on social justice guide us in living a holy life and building a just society. The responsibility to work for social justice requires people to work to eliminate the sinful inequalities that exist among peoples. We are one human and global family. We are to share our possessions, and more importantly, our spiritual blessings. Social justice requires that we respect and promote the fundamental rights of the human person.

This is a huge undertaking. The need for change is great, both in our own country and throughout the world. However, change begins in small ways, with individuals and small groups. Here are four examples from the files of Catholic Charities, an organization that works to help people in need.

- In Florida a young girl celebrates her birthday by asking each guest to bring a present for a child in need rather than for her. Her "party" guests spend a few hours wrapping holiday gifts for children who otherwise would get none.
- In Texas a restaurant sponsors HOPE (Helping Other People Eat). When customers bring in food to donate to a local charity, the restaurant offers them a discount on the price of their meals.
- Throughout the United States young people volunteer to fix up run-down houses in their own and other communities.

- After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, thousands of volunteers offered their time to help rebuild homes for victims of the hurricane. Catholic schools were also quickly rebuilt with the help of volunteers. This enabled children affected by the storm to resume their education, even as their families struggled to get back to a normal everyday life at home.

These are four of the many ways in which people work for social justice. Much has been accomplished, but much more still needs to be done. The challenge is clear. So is Jesus' message: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you do for one of these least [sisters or] brothers of mine, you do for me" (Matthew 25:40).



Our Church Teaches

Our Church teaches that the "arms race is one of the greatest curses of the human race and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2329). We are all called to work to liberate the poor and oppressed from their suffering and from violations of their human rights. Public authorities must also work to bring about this freedom. We have a right to receive information

from newspapers and other media promoting truth, freedom, and justice.

We Believe
The domestic Church
is a place where
parents can nurture
and teach their children
about Christ's love and
message of justice.

Because God created everyone, all people have equal dignity. This dignity requires that social and economic inequalities be erased. Sinful and immoral inequalities, such as the unlawful taking of others' money or the selling of people as goods or as slaves, especially require our attention in the quest for social justice.

Activities

1. There are so many issues of inequality and violations of human rights that need to be addressed, including poverty, war, and child labor. Which issue concerns you most?

Is this a local problem, a nationwide concern, or a worldwide issue?

What organizations are working to help solve this problem? What additional group efforts could help?

Is there any way that you personally can help solve this problem?



2. The Corporal Works of Mercy, which tell us very specific ways that we are called to help others, are listed in the first column. Beside each one, list something that you have done or can do to meet this Gospel responsibility. (Note: The Corporal Works of Mercy are based on the words of Jesus and are used in the prayer celebration on page 294.)

The Corporal Works of Mercy	What I have done/ can do to help
Feed the hungry.	<hr/>
Give drink to the thirsty.	<hr/>
Clothe the naked.	<hr/>
Visit those in prison.	<hr/>
Shelter the homeless.	<hr/>
Visit the sick.	<hr/>
Bury the dead.	<hr/>

What difference can one person make in the world?

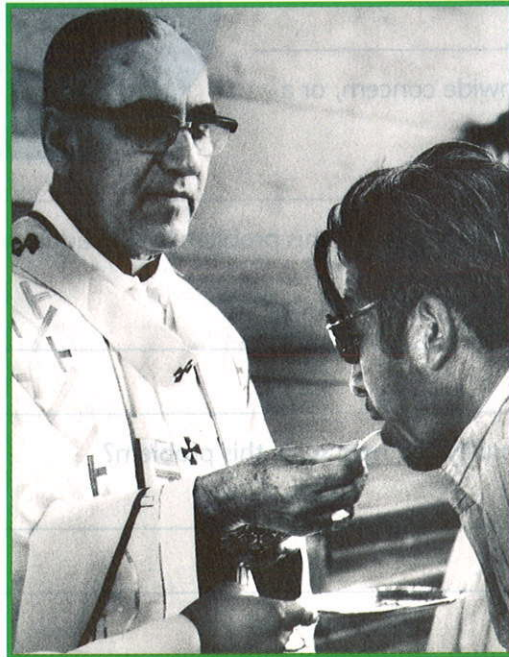


Respond

Oscar Romero

Father Oscar Romero knew there was fighting between the wealthy landowners in El Salvador and the poor who worked the land for only pennies per day. Although some priests condemned both the landowners and the government for trampling on the human rights of the poor, Romero, at first, did not. Instead, he spoke against priests for being too radical in the ways they were acting.

In 1977, shortly after Romero became Archbishop of San Salvador, something happened that changed him completely. A young Jesuit priest was brutally murdered because he had spoken out in support of the poor. When the government of El Salvador failed to investigate the murder, Archbishop Romero began to openly question the government. From that day on Romero spent his life fighting against human rights violations, defending human rights, and promoting the teachings of the Catholic Church on social justice.



Romero gave his life while living out the principle that all society has a right to information based on truth, justice, and freedom. At Mass he read aloud a list of people who had been murdered during the week. On his weekly radio show he reported unjust actions committed by the government. He wrote to U.S. President Jimmy Carter and begged him to stop sending money to help the Salvadoran government. He appealed directly to the soldiers of the Salvadoran army: "The peasants you kill are your brothers and sisters. When you hear the voice of the man commanding you to kill, remember instead the voice of God, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*. . . . In the name of God . . . stop the repression."

The next day, as he was celebrating Mass, an assassin fired a single shot, hitting Romero in the heart. Several weeks before he was killed, he had said, "If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people. . . . My hope is that my blood will be like a seed of liberty."

Activities

1. What made Oscar Romero begin to oppose the government? How can you explain his change of heart?

2. Describe how Oscar Romero's death might have affected people in El Salvador.

3. Read the following Scripture verses. Choose one verse and tell how you could apply it in your own life to help the poor.

He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor
will himself also call and not be heard.

Proverbs 21:13

If someone who has worldly means sees a brother
in need and refuses him compassion, how can
the love of God remain in him? 1 John 3:17

“Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn
your back on one who wants to borrow.” Matthew 5:42

“Whoever has two cloaks should share with the
person who has none. And whoever has food
should do likewise.” Luke 3:11

4. Being a responsible consumer is a good way to help the poor. Buying products made by companies that treat their workers with dignity is being a responsible consumer. Think of another way you can be a responsible consumer. Write your answer on the lines below.

What did
Jesus teach
about our
responsibility
to the poor?





Prayer Celebration

Praying in Jesus' Words

Jesus loved the poor. With your class, act out this parable that Jesus told about how his Father will treat those who help the poor.

Leader: "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

Reader 1: For I was hungry and you gave me food,

Reader 2: I was thirsty and you gave me drink,

Reader 3: a stranger and you welcomed me,

Reader 4: naked and you clothed me,

Reader 5: ill and you cared for me,

Reader 6: in prison and you visited me.'

Leader: Then the righteous will answer him and say, '[Lord, when did we do all these things?]' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Matthew 25:34-40

A Complete these sentences with words from the box.

1. An _____ is a letter from the Pope to the whole Church in which he clarifies or reinforces Catholic teachings.
2. A message from a bishop or bishops giving guidance to the members of the Church or society is a _____.
3. _____ requires that we respect and promote the fundamental rights of the human person.
4. People have the responsibility to share their material and _____ blessings with others, especially with the poor.
5. Christians must work to change the world from one of unfairness to one of _____.

spiritual pastoral letter encyclical social justice justice

B Describe the life and work of Oscar Romero. State how he showed his love for the poor.

- C** Match the speaker or writer in Column A with the statement in Column B by writing the correct number in the space provided.

A

1. Jesus in Matthew's Gospel
2. Pope John Paul II in "The Gospel of Life"
3. Pope Paul VI in "Joy and Hope"
4. The bishops in the United States "Economic Justice for All"
5. Pope John XXIII in "Peace on Earth"

B

- ___ "We must not look at the welfare of United States citizens as the only good to be sought."
- ___ All Christians are called to be in solidarity with the poor.
- ___ "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."
- ___ "God destined . . . that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind. . . ."
- ___ "Solve . . . problems with respect for the dignity of individuals and families."

- D** Explain how the Ten Commandments, the Gospel message, and human dignity call us to social justice. How can individuals and small groups work to promote social justice?

- E** Write a prayer in which you ask God for the grace to perform one of the Corporal Works of Mercy that you see a need for in your family or community.
