

THE CASE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE



What does it mean to be Catholic? Pope Benedict tells us that the Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility:

1. Proclaiming the word of God
2. Celebrating the sacraments
3. Exercising the ministry of charity

These duties ... are inseparable. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Est Caritas*, 2005.)

What else does it mean to be Catholic? We are called to go forth to proclaim the Gospel. The Catholic Church reminds us of this as it begins a recommitment for all followers of Christ to be *witnesses* to the ends of the earth, proclaiming the good news to all people everywhere, starting with those in our own Church. This recommitment is known as the New Evangelization.

The Church is also celebrating the Year of Faith during which faith is to be “professed, celebrated, lived and prayed” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 2012, #9.)

What does it mean that our faith is to be lived? “The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the *witness* of charity. As Saint Paul reminds us: ‘So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love’ (1 Cor 13:13). With even stronger words – which have always placed Christians under obligation – Saint James said: ‘...faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.’ (Jas 2:14-18).” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei* #14.)

What is love? St. Paul reminds us that the “greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13). In the original language the word that we call “love” was “agape.” “Agape” is best understood as selfless love felt by Christians for their fellow human being. A more accurate translation, then, would be “charity,” where we respect others and feel selfless love for others for no other reason than they are human.

To selflessly love someone is to:

1. Desire that person's good
2. Not only the good of the individual but also the good that is linked to living in society: the common good, the good of “all of us”
3. Take effective steps to secure it

What does the Church mean by “charity;” is charity the same as works, charitable work? Pope Benedict explains that “justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, ‘the minimum measure’ of it. To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity. The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them.” (*Caritas In Veritate*, 2009, #6, 7.)

Pope Benedict continues, “Every Christian is called to practice this charity. This is the institutional path — we might also call it the political path — of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly...” (*Caritas In Veritate*, #7.)

How is this social justice? The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that “Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.” (#1928)

That is, our Catholic faith requires us to live our faith and be witnesses to our faith by ensuring the common good through justice, which is the institutional or political path of charity.



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace