

WHEN BREAD IS ENOUGH



We long for the day that we enter the kingdom of God where love and justice abound. Until that day we show our love for God by building His kingdom right here where we live, a kingdom of justice and faithful witnesses of His love.

What does “a kingdom of ... faithful witnesses of His love” look like? With his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, Pope Benedict XVI declares this year a “Year of Faith” that begins on October 11, 2012 and concludes on November 24, 2013. He notes that this will 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).”

For its first seven years my parish’s Social Justice Committee had 18 participants. They were not always the same people yet a core of passionate volunteers remained, dedicated to helping their brothers and sisters. Then the numbers dwindled.

About the time participation declined, our St. Vincent de Paul food pantry opened its doors. While the Social Justice Committee fell to ten participants at most, the food pantry attracted more than 60 committed volunteers.

Last month I wrote in “*Is Bread Enough?*” that our Catholic call to work for justice (“the primary way of charity” [Pope Benedict XVI]) emboldens us to change the “economic and political structures to create a just society.” Our parish Social Justice Ministry existed to work for these changes so that charity did not become the comfortable but defensive response to society’s problems. As I learned to use the tools of social justice to build God’s kingdom, the waning enthusiasm for social justice and the enthusiastic response for the new food pantry saddened me.

Forty-six million Americans are poor, however. This number would be smaller with a safety net that wasn’t torn, an economic system that was just, and a robust economy that focused on the well-being of *all* (the common good); but the 46 million poor cannot wait for these to happen. They are hungry today. While the effects of the Great Recession linger we must support every effort to feed our hungry brothers and sisters. We would be heartless if we were to ignore them. “Never see a need without doing something about it.” – Sister Mary MacKillop

In today’s reading we hear, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

Pope Benedict tells us that these words “have always placed Christians under obligation.” He continues, “Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other...Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (*Mt 25:40*).”

I now take heart at the sight of the dozens of fellow parishioners who combine charity with their faith. Rather than bemoan the migration away from our Social Justice Ministry, I appreciate the opportunity to evangelize to these volunteers by connecting their commitment to Catholic social teaching, by drawing on their concern for the hungry and introducing them to opportunities to advocate to end hunger, such as the 2012 Farm Bill with full funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which is how food pantries have enough food for their clients.

Food pantries are at the core of our faith. Supporting food pantries with time, money and food is a manifestation of our faith. It is why we are Catholics. It is faith *with* works. It is having a heart.

(Readings for 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time)



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