

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS OPEN TO EVERYONE



Everyone is invited to the Kingdom of God. The doors to the Kingdom of God that we build here on earth remain open to all brothers and sisters. Prestige and possessions don't move you to the front of the line.

We see this in Sunday's first reading, "The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. ... There was no needy person among them."

Like the apostles of the early church, the concerns of today's Church lie with the needy, the poorest 25% of society: those who struggle with having enough food to eat and clean water to drink; those who seek shelter from the cold and a warm smile instead of a cold shoulder; those whose livelihood as farmers depends on the weather.

Yes, the Church worries not about the wealth of the upper 1%. Wealth is not sinful. What concerns the church is not the wealth but how wealth was achieved, how wealth is used, and where one's gaze falls and what gives rise to one's attentions.

The Church demands that we recognize our fellowship with the poor. The Gospel calls us individually to assist those most in need and to reach out to the most vulnerable members of society. The story of the Last Judgment instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

To understand the poverty and vulnerability of others requires that we are in proximity. Isolated in my Southwest Portland neighborhood, where the absence of restaurants within walking distance is my livability concern, I become blind to my brothers and sisters in poverty-stricken neighborhoods whose concern is to live.

Catholic teaching also calls *society* to assist those most in need and demands that *society* reach out to the most vulnerable members of society.

"A basic moral test for our *society* is how we treat the most vulnerable in our midst." *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2007*

The disciples understood this: In their community, "there was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need."

Our community is the Kingdom of God. In this kingdom, not only is everyone invited but also those in need are cared for. The good of the Kingdom – the health of this community – depends upon the welfare of each individual, even those one might consider "last in line." This principle of Catholic teaching – the principle of the "common good" – stands in contrast to the secular philosophy of "survival of the fittest."

"While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern." *Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching" U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2005*

By sharing their goods for the benefit of all, the apostles lived the teachings of their Lord Jesus. They bore witness to the resurrected Christ and thus had faith in the Word.

Jesus reminds us that "blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Though we may not have seen the risen Christ, we continue to believe and live our faith.

How we care for the least of the brothers and sisters of Jesus is the measure of how we live our faith. (Sunday Readings for April 12, 2015)



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