



Let Justice and Peace Flow

Season of Creation 2023

A Mighty River
Amos 5: 24

This year's theme for the Season of Creation "Let Justice and Peace Flow" takes inspiration from the Prophet Amos who declares: "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5: 24). And so we are called to join the river of justice and peace, to take up climate and ecological justice, and to speak out with and for communities most impacted by climate injustice and the loss of biodiversity. As the people of God, we must work together on behalf of all Creation, as part of that mighty river of peace and justice.

For Catholics, an increased awareness of caring for and protecting our Common Home has been an emerging theme in **Catholic Social Teaching** over the past thirty years or so.

Intro to Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) provides a vision for a just society in which all people are respected, and where the most vulnerable are cared for. It consists of an interrelated body of Catholic social thought which can be used to reflect on and guide how we relate to one another in our local and global communities. CST has its roots in Scripture, the teachings of Church leaders from throughout its history and in the work of communities that cry out for justice and peace.

Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching is said to have begun with the encyclical *Rerum Novarum (On Capital and Labour)* written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 in which the Holy Father addressed the conditions of the working class and the responsibilities of wider society to protect the rights of workers. Since 1891, many popes and Bishop's Conferences have written letters about issues facing society, for example, migration, poverty, hunger, injustice, conflict and climate change. Together, these writings form the core of CST.

What is an Encyclical?

An Encyclical is a pastoral letter written by a Pope on an important matter of faith that effects the whole Church. It is usually addressed to all members of the Church, or sometimes to the whole world.

There are some core principles which guide and form Catholic Social Teaching.

Human Dignity: The focal point of Catholic Social Teaching is the human person.

Christians believe that every human being is made in God's image and likeness. Because of this, every person has an innate dignity that must be honoured with fundamental freedom, dignity and human rights. By recognising this, we realise that humans cannot be reduced to mere consumers or workers. The development of any society must take place alongside the development of the human person, and not overwhelm it.

'When the dignity of the human person is respected, and his or her rights recognised and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive, and the creativity of the human personality is released through actions that further the common good' (Fratelli Tutti, 22).

The Common Good: Human beings exist as part of society. Every individual has a duty and right to take part in community life and a right to benefit from that community. Essentially, the fruits of our Common Home belong to all. This applies at every level: local, national and international. Public authorities exist mainly to promote the common good and to ensure that no section of the population is excluded.

'Beside the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of 'all of us', made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society' (Caritas in Veritate, 7).

Solidarity: Solidarity is the fundamental bond of unity with our fellow human beings. The principle of solidarity moves us towards encounters with others. It is a proactive notion, one which concerns not only the quality of our relationships but also calls us to address injustices suffered by others. Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of others, whether nearby or far away. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the good of all, because we all truly are responsible for all.

"Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all." (Fratelli Tutti, 1).

Subsidiarity: All people have the right to be involved in society, and in making decisions that directly affect their life and community. Subsidiarity requires that decisions and laws are made at the lowest level possible, as long as this can be done adequately. When it cannot, higher levels of government must intervene. The role of government is to promote human dignity, protect human rights and promote the common good.

"It is clearly laid down that the paramount task assigned to government officials is that of recognizing, respecting, reconciling, protecting and promoting the rights and duties of citizens" (Pacem in Terris, 77)

Option for the Poor: The Option for the Poor places the needs of the poor and most vulnerable as the highest priority. It is the conscious choice to stand in solidarity with those who live in poverty, who are marginalized, who suffer injustice. It recognizes that *'In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others'* (Octogesima Adveniens, 23). In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis brings this to a new level by saying that *'the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor'* (*Laudato Si*, 1). He points out however, that *"a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor"* (*Laudato Si*, 46).

Care of Creation: Our Common Home – the Earth – is sacred. As God's Creation, it has a value of its own which demands our respect and care. We are responsible for preserving it for future generations. In 2015, Pope Francis brought together Church social thought and the work of science in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. This influential letter was addressed to ALL the people of the world and calls each of us to reflect on how our actions effecting the Earth and what action we must take to safeguard the future of our Earth.

*Lord, teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. (Prayer from Laudato Si', 246)*

Peace: As Christians, we are called to live in right relationship with God and with our fellow human beings. Peace is more than the absence of war or conflict; it is a recognition of the rights of others and respect for their dignity. It involves bringing together all of the other principles so that all can 'have life, and live it to the fullest' (John 10:10).

If you want peace, work for justice! Pope Paul VI

If you would like to learn more about Catholic Social Teaching, the following resources may be helpful:

<https://youtu.be/ELYLdMIFdzA>

Short intro video to CST

<https://social-spirituality.net/catholic-social-teaching-documents/>

Church Documents that inform CST

<https://www.caritas.org.au/learn/cst-toolkit/>

More info on the CST principles

The above is based on material from Trócaire and the Irish Bishops' Conference.