



Practicing Catholic Social Teaching is Charity!

by CAPP-USA

What is Charity?

“Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1822*) It is the “love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God”. (*Deus Caritas Est, 20*)

Charity is the “actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2447*) and “is first and foremost a responsibility of each individual member of the faithful”. (*Deus Caritas Est, 20*)

Charity **requires engaging, directly, those around us who are in need.**

Without Charity There is No Social Justice

“When animated by charity, commitment to the common good has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have.” (*Caritas in Veritate, 7*) As Pope Francis says, “if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO, but not the Church”. (*Pope Francis, Missa Pro Ecclesia Homily*)



Practicing Catholic social teaching is charity.

Without charity [corporal and spiritual works of mercy and implementing Catholic social teaching] the Church warns us that social justice results in a cold, legalistic public square – a society lacking true *solidarity*.

We must understand: to practice Catholic social teaching is charity!

Practicing Charity

Charity can be expressed in three ways: corporal works of mercy; spiritual works of mercy; or, implementing the tenets of Catholic social teaching in society.

The **Corporal Works of Mercy** are feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; shelter the homeless; visit the sick; visit the imprisoned; bury the dead. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2447*).

The **Spiritual Works of Mercy** are to admonish the sinner; instruct the ignorant; counsel the doubtful; comfort the sorrowful; bear wrongs patiently; forgive all injuries; pray for the living and the dead.

Applying Catholic Social Teaching is Charity

"It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering." (*Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 186*).

Our catechesis, whether as children or adults, typically fails to reveal that practicing Catholic social teaching is charity. It fails to identify that "Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine." (*Caritas in Veritate, 2*) That, "To defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in our life are...**exacting and indispensable forms of charity**". (*Pope Benedict XVI, 1*).

The practice of Catholic social teaching "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**, outside the institutional mediation of the polis." (emphasis ours) (*Caritas in Veritate, 7*).

And, this has been clear for decades. Pope Pius XII said in 1949, "The social program of the Catholic Church is based upon three powerful pillars: truth, justice and Christian charity." ("Catholic Social Principles: The Social Teachings of the Catholic Church Applied to American Economic Life" by Rev. John F. Cronin, S.S., The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, WI, 1955.)

While Pope Benedict XVI more recently said, "'Caritas in Veritate' is the principle around which the church's social doctrine turns". (*Caritas in Veritate, 6*).

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Catholic Social Teaching is a "Requirement"

Practicing Catholic social teaching is **binding** – a "requirement" of lay spirituality – of living out our lives in the world. "Every Christian is called to practice this charity in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields". (*Caritas in Veritate, 7*).

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“In reality, social instruction ‘incarnates’ the faithful in society. It places a duty upon Christians to give flesh to his or her faith...The time for the church to be silent about her specific and binding foundation thus lies behind us”. (Paul Cardinal Cordes, Not Without the Light of Faith: Catholic Social Doctrine, speech at The Australian Catholic University, 27 November 2009)

Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged that his seminal social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, was focused on this ‘requirement’: “It was the problem of a positive laicity, practiced and interpreted correctly” that is “also a fundamental theme of the encyclical Caritas in Veritate.” (*Address to the Roman Curia*).

Practicing Catholic social teaching is not an option. As Catholics we must live our faith in the Public Square – for the betterment of all. And this requires personal conversion. We are being called to “an exacting and indispensable form of charity” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 1) grounding us in faith in the risen Christ as the basis of Catholic social teaching.

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