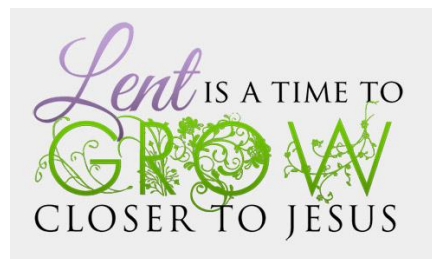
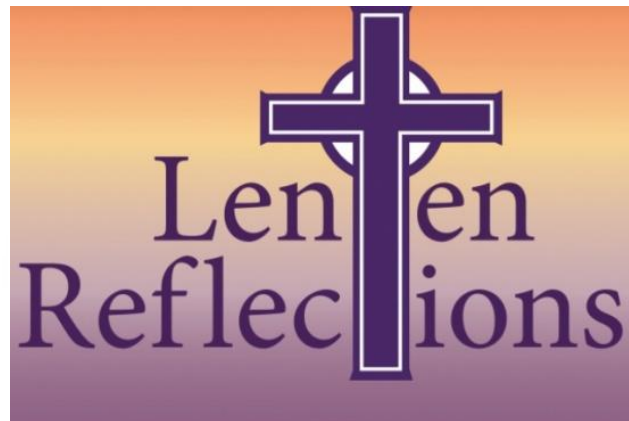




# CCSJ'S 2017 LENTEN REFLECTIONS ON KEY SOCIAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES



*“To all people of good will who are working for social justice: never tire of working for a more just world, marked by greater solidarity!... None of us can think we are exempt from concerns for the poor and for social justice”. (Pope Francis)*



**Introduction by Leela Ramdeen,  
Chair, The Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ)**

My brothers and sisters, as we journey through Lent this year, let this be an opportunity to deepen our faith and renew our resolve to be true witnesses to Christ. However we can only be true witnesses if we know what it means to be “Catholic.” Unless we define ourselves through our *Catholic Culture and Identity*, we may be lured by the vagaries of modern society. “We cannot be called truly “Catholic” unless we hear and heed the Church's call to serve those in need and work for justice and peace.” (*Communities of Salt and Light, U.S. Bishops, 1993*).

The Catholic Church has a vision and mission that will help us transform ourselves, our communities, and the world so that Truth, Justice, Peace, Love and Freedom will prevail, as divinely ordained by God. We are all Missionaries in our Church. However, too often we allow the secular world to influence the way in which we live and our hearts grow cold to the needs of our neighbour. Our credibility and authenticity as people of faith depend on the way in which we live our lives and give witness to the teachings of our faith. We have a duty, as Catholics, to SEE, JUDGE, and ACT. To do this effectively, we need to inform our consciences and develop our awareness first through the teachings of our Church and secondly by our embodiment of the Word.

The reflections contained in this booklet are based on the following key social justice themes which are targeted to help raise our awareness and deepen our personal relationship with God: The Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community, Participation and the Common Good; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; Rights and Responsibilities; the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity; Care for God’s Creation; the Role of Government and Subsidiarity; and the Promotion of Peace.

Life is about perspective through which we all envision our reality and so we have attempted through these pages to present four different analogies of each key social justice theme, much like the four Gospels, with the hope that one of these accounts may mirror your own faith story to help you through the Gethsemane experience of Lent. Read Pope Francis' 2017 Lenten Message on the theme: “The Word is a gift. The other is a gift.” CCSJ's Newsletter will focus on his Message. To be authentic witnesses to Christ, we need to open up to the Holy Spirit. On October 6 2016, Pope Francis reminded us that "In order to understand and to embrace Jesus' words, we need to open up to the power of the Holy Spirit. And when a man or a woman opens up to the Holy Spirit, they are like sailing boats that are pushed along by the wind and they just keep on going".

*Let us pray that we will be open to receive the fire of the Holy Spirit so that our hearts will be ignited and we will be passionate missionaries of Christ, promoting social justice and spreading the Good News in T&T and the world*

## DAY 1      The Life and Dignity of the Human Person



*Each of us has a mission...each of us is called to change the world, to work for a culture of life, a culture forged by love and respect for the dignity of each human person. (Pope Benedict XVI)*

*“then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7)*

Imagine for a moment The Lord of heaven and earth taking the time to fashion Adam out of the dust of the ground. Imagine God working like a master potter to form and shape the man.

Picture God’s eyes as they pay attention to every single detail, and see those eyes as they are filled with joy and love as His creation takes form. Imagine God looking at His work of art with a smile. Then, God realises that it was great but it was missing one thing, the breath of life! And so God breathed it into the man’s nostrils. This wasn’t done for the rest of creation, so we humans are special!

It is this special nature that is at the heart of our social teaching. Every human person - from the moment of conception to natural death, is God’s work of art, dust and breath – made in His image and likeness and redeemed by the blood of Christ! And because of this they are worthy of our respect and support. So, today let us pray, fast, and give alms in a way that affirms each person’s special nature as God’s work of art.

**Prayer:** Lord, as I step out into the world today may I be reminded of my dignity as Your prized creation; May I celebrate this dignity in all that I think, say and do. May I help others to know that they, too, are gifts, And may I respect and defend each person as Your precious work of art. I ask this through Christ, Your Son. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection**

‘You must love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than this” (Mark 12:31).

## DAY 2 Call to Family, Community, and the Common Good



*“...Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23-24)*

Adam finds a helper in Eve. He sees in her an equal and someone with whom he can share an exclusive, loving relationship. The author of Genesis even goes on to link “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” with the call to marriage and family life.

From the very beginning God intended for us to live in families and to express love through the marital bond; but, as we know, many people do not experience marriage and family life as a loving and life-giving union of persons.

So, today, let us pray for marriages and families that are struggling, and cannot see “bone of my bones” and flesh of my flesh” in each other. Let us also ask the Lord to show us how we can give alms by supporting hurting marriages and families around us. Let us renew our commitment to our own marriages and families and strive always to see the other as a gift and an opportunity for true relationship.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, today I bring before You all marriages and families that are in pain and are unable to respect and affirm the dignity of their members. Renew in them the ability to see each other as a gift. Give them the grace and courage to live and love as one in You. I ask this through Christ, the Lord. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection**

Jesus said, ‘I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full’ (John 10.10).

## DAY 3      Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



*“Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear! Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.’ Then the LORD said to him, ‘Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.’ And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him” (Genesis 4:13-15).*

“Dey go kill mih!” Many a Cain still lives today; men and women who have committed grievous crimes and are fearful of death. Some have murdered, others raped, and some have even destroyed the lives of entire families and communities. Inside of us we can feel like the people who may have wanted to harm Cain for what he had done, but today the scripture reveals another way.

God does not say, “Yes boy! It good! You want to kill? Take dat!”, or “Yes, I hope dey hang you high!” Rather God says “No!” and He marks Cain to protect him.

Today, we are invited to ask God for the grace to imitate His choice. We are called to be a people of life not death! Let us ask God to give us the grace not to give in to our feelings of anger and our longing for vengeance. Let us work and pray to meet the needs of victims of crime and promote restorative justice - to rehabilitate and not kill criminals.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us today to open our eyes. Help us to find more restorative ways to heal the pain that we have caused. Even now, help us to pray for the grace to help all victims of crime to grieve and heal. We pray for the grace to forgive offenders. Free us, Lord, from anger. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection**

“The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,  
for he has anointed me.  
He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,  
to proclaim liberty to captives  
and to the blind new sight,  
to set the downtrodden free,  
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour” (Luke 4: 18-19).

## DAY 4 Rights and Responsibilities

# With Rights Come Responsibilities

### ***Buffet at a Cost***

*“the LORD God commanded the man, You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”* (Genesis 2:16-17)

Adam had it real nice! Talk about buffet! He could freely eat everything, except the fruit from one tree. Eating from the tree God told Adam not to eat from would result in death. As we would learn later, it would not be an immediate physical death, but a spiritual and internal one.

This scenario reminds me of our call to balance rights and responsibilities in life. We have a right to many important things like food, shelter, education, participation, etc., but, like Adam, it is not just about acting on our rights freely; we must take into account our responsibilities to God, neighbour, and our environment, before acting on these rights.

There are things we should and should not do to honour the rights we have. For Adam it was to not eat, for us it could be to respect time, be responsible about work and school, etc. It is when we do not do these things that we too experience some form of death in our lives.

So, today, what are the responsibilities that you need to pay more attention to? What tree are you eating from?

### **Prayer:**

God of love, I am grateful for all of Your blessings. Help me to show my gratitude by dutifully living out my rights and the responsibilities that go with them. I ask this through Christ, the Lord. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection**

2 Corinthians 9:9

As scripture says: he was free in almsgiving and gave to the poor; his good deeds will never be forgotten.

## DAY 5 The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers



Work honors the  
gifts and talents that God has  
given to each one of us.

*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.*” (Genesis 2:15).

The garden provided all that Adam and Eve would need for life.

It was given as a gift to them. All God asked was that they take care of the garden.

What is the purpose of work? St. John Paul II expresses it clearly, “Work is a good thing for man -a good thing for his humanity - because through work man ... achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being’”(Laborem Exercens, 9). We are called then not to see work just as a means to the end of getting a salary. Work is an essential part of being human; all then are called to work, using their God-given talents in whatever way they can.

What is your attitude towards work? Why do you work, if you do? Why do you want a job? Is it for the pay or is it to live out your humanity?

Pope Francis said on the dignity of work: "When society is organized in such a way that not everyone has the opportunity to work, to be anointed with the dignity of work, then there is something wrong with that society: it is not right! It goes against God himself, who wanted our dignity, starting from here."

**Prayer:** Lord, our God, from the very beginning You appointed humanity to work. Help me to have the right attitude towards work and income. Help me to work well, and offer my best at all time, so that I may give glory to your name. Lead employers to act justly towards their employees.

I ask this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, and the carpenter from Nazareth. Amen.

### Scripture Reflection

The Lord blesses our work so that we may share its fruits with others.

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

‘At the end of every three years you must take all the tithes of your harvests for that year and deposit them at your doors. Then the Levite (since he has no share or inheritance with you), the stranger, the orphan and the widow who live in your towns, may come and eat and have all they want. So shall God bless you in all the work that your hands undertake.

## DAY 6

## Solidarity



### All ah We is One Family!

*“Yahweh God said, 'It is not right that the man should be alone. I shall make him a helper.'”*  
(Genesis 2:18)

We were made for relationship! In the beginning God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone. There was a need for the Man to have another with whom to share life and love. This longing for another is felt by every human person. We all want to form relationships and to know that we are not alone.

It is based on this longing that the Church calls on each person to live in solidarity with all of humanity. We have been made as helpers and partners to each other.

Solidarity challenges each of us to fight against indifference and isolation; it calls us always to be concerned for others, no matter how far away they are because it is never good for anyone to feel alone!

Do you see yourself as a helper to others? Is your heart open to the pain and plight of those around you and the wider community and in the global village? How can you be more aware of what is happening around you and, more importantly, how can you respond?

**Prayer:** Holy Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You made me to live in relationship after Your own likeness. Help me to live in unity with all of my brothers and sisters, by living as a true helper and partner to all.

I ask this through Christ, the Lord. Amen.

### Scripture Reflection

‘These are the things that you must do. Speak the truth to one another; let the judgments at your gates be such as conduce to peace’ (Zechariah 8:16).



## DAY 7      Stewardship of Creation



*“The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed” (Genesis 2:8).*

Your Sole Provider.

I am sure that while we were growing up we expected our parents to give us all that we wanted and needed. Sometimes they may have done so, and sometimes, even though they may have wanted to, they just could not. We may have been upset, disappointed, and we may even have put down a good cry or two when we didn't get what we wanted.

Even though this may have been caused by our childish ways, there is something in us that expected them to be able to give us everything! Well in today's verse from Genesis we find the answer to the longing of our hearts. God is the one who can give us everything! God is revealed as our true provider. The great thing is that we don't have to do chores, or do well in a test to earn it; and all God hopes for in return is our love and fidelity to His Commandments.

The garden was God's gift to Adam. In it God provided for all of Adam's needs, and guess what, Adam represents each one of us!

God has given the earth and all that it contains as our Eden. It has all that we need to survive and although it isn't as perfect as Eden, it surely is the only home we have. As heirs and joint heirs with Christ, we now have the responsibility of being caretaker of all creation; to be stewards of the earth and to leave it in a better condition than we received it.....Awesome responsibility, right?

With this in mind let us remember today the great gift of creation. It is one of God's treasures to us, and, like any giver, God hopes that we will take care of it.

As you pray, fast, and give alms, how are you showing God that you are grateful for creation?

**Prayer:** Father, our true provider, today, we thank You for the gift of creation. We thank You for this sign of Your love and affection. Give us the grace we pray, to be true stewards of your creation, so that we, and those who will come after us, will enjoy it. We ask this through Christ the Lord. Amen.

**Scripture Reflection:** “God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it” (Genesis 2: 15).

## DAY 8 The Role of Government



### Making Your Presence Felt

*“But he said to them, ‘Among the gentiles it is the kings who lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are given the title Benefactor.*

*With you this must not happen. No; the greatest among you must behave as if he were the least, the leader as if he were the one who serves” (Luke 22:25-26).*

Every leader wants to know that their people feel their presence, whether this be at election time or throughout their term in office. Some make their presence felt by “flexing their muscles” to remind others that they are strong and in control, while others let their leadership be felt in the way they serve.

Today, Jesus recognises the different ways in which a person can rule. They can “lord” it over their people, or they can serve. Jesus’ vision is that of a leader who truly *serves*. The true leader or government has at its heart the people that they serve. This is the main criterion that Jesus presents for leadership. It isn’t race, status, family allegiance to a party or leader, or what they could do for me; it is the willingness to humbly serve the entire population that makes a person a true leader.

Do you feel that our politicians are servant leaders? Is this what you look for when electing officials? What are your criteria for selecting a leader? What can you do to help a new vision for governance emerge in our country?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You came to serve and not to be served. You are the model of true leadership. May our officials learn from Your example, and may our people demand true leadership, and promote it at all levels of our society.

I ask this in Your holy name. Amen.

### Scripture Reflection:

“...choose from the people at large some capable and God-fearing men, trustworthy and incorruptible, and appoint them as leaders of the people...le these be at the service of the people to administer justice at all times” (Exodus 18:21-22).

## DAY 9 The Promotion of Peace - Keeping the Garden Watered



“A river flowed from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided to make four streams” (Genesis 2:10).

So how do these four rivers (Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Euphrates) affect our lives? That’s a great question!

According to several spiritual writers, the watered garden represents our lives. In order for our lives to be watered there must be a source of water and one that divides into four branches. These four branches have been compared to the four relationships that we are called to have, in order to have a beautiful garden: We are to relate well with ourselves, others, God and all of creation. It is when these four rivers are flowing in our lives that we can be assured that our garden is well watered.

Lent is a great time to focus on ALL of these rivers, not just one or two, but all of them. We are called to care for the “whole person” and “every person”. In this way we can accomplish God’s desire for our lives. So imagine your rivers. Are any dry? Are they blocked up? Do you feel *life* moving through them? What can you do to get the water flowing again?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You promised that springs of living water would *well up* in those who believe. Today I ask that you renew in me the four rivers of **right relationships**. Help me to love myself, others, creation and most of all, to love **You**. Help me to achieve a balance in my life so that none of the rivers will run dry, and if they do, help me to get them flowing again. I ask this in Your Holy Name. Amen.

**Scripture Reflection:** Psalm 85:10, is a prayer for peace: “*Love and Loyalty now meet, Righteousness and Peace now embrace. Loyalty reaches up from earth, And Righteousness leans down from heaven.*”

*Peace is not the product of terror or fear.*

*Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.*

*Peace is not the silent revolt of violent repression.*

*Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.*

*Peace is dynamism.*

*Peace is generosity.*

*It is right and it is duty.* (Archbishop Oscar Romero – 1917 -1980)

**Keep the garden watered by living according to the teachings of our Church.**

## DAY 10 Participation



**A Real Party Mentality:** *“when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; Then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again.”* (Luke 14:13-14)

Celebrate with those who can't repay you! It's a completely different concept from our everyday way of life. The blind, the lame, the crippled, the poor? Dat sounds like a charity event not a party. But for Jesus, everyone has a place, especially those who can't repay us.

This “party mentality” of Jesus extends to all areas of our lives, and to our society as a whole. Our culture and structures are challenged by the Gospel to ensure that all can enter and participate! Not only those who can repay or give back to society. Our families, religious bodies, educational institutions, and workplaces are to be places where all can be welcomed and given a space in de party.....remove the all-inclusive sections that exclude some!

The document, *Justice in the World*, produced by the Bishops at the World Synod of Catholic Bishops, 1971, states clearly that “Participation constitutes a right which is to be applied both in the economic and in the social and political field... In order that the right to development may be fulfilled by action: (a) people should not be hindered from attaining developing in accordance with their own culture; (b) through mutual cooperation, all peoples should be able to become the principal architects of their own economic and social development” (18,71).

Today, let us reject our throwaway culture and remember that each individual has a right to participate in society. Stand firm to create a space for all – including the poor, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, the socially excluded and so on. Is everyone able to join in the party of life, and in our society? How do we help to ensure inclusivity at all levels, and allow each person to participate according to his/her abilities?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I thank You for giving us the example of what You called us to today. You allowed all to come to you, and You found a way to help all to feel included and respected. Give me the grace to create spaces and structures where all can participate. Help our society as well to be more inclusive at all levels. I ask this in Your holy name. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection**

What is good has been explained to you, man;

This is what God asks of you:

Only this, to act justly,

To love tenderly

And to walk humbly with your God. \_Micah 6: 6-8

## DAY 11 Human Dignity



*Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. (The Church in the Modern World, 27)*

At the foundation of Catholic social teaching is the basic dignity of the human person. All persons are created equal and the life of each one is sacred. The Creation story in Genesis 1 tells us that when God created the world, He saw that it was good and when He created man, He saw that he very good. Each human being is of worth.

Human dignity extends from the moment of conception to natural death – at all stages and in all circumstances Thus, discrimination of any kind violates the dignity of the person whether it be in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, class, economic status, age, gender, abilities or disabilities, and so does any form of degradation such as abuse, violence, sexual or economic slavery.

In our world today where human life and dignity seem to be devalued, denigrated and degraded, let us first of all respect our own dignity and worth as children of God redeemed by Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit and in turn extend that respect to our brothers and sisters in Christ. “The human need for dignity and recognition is a gift easily given to one another, but also frighteningly easy to withhold.” Maya Angelou.

### **Scripture Reflection**

God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth’ (Genesis 1: 26-27).

## DAY 12 Community and the Common Good



The common good speaks to respecting the rights of the individual, respecting the rights of groups in the community and society and peace. This notion is in keeping with the Church's teaching that human life is sacred and that each person has inherent dignity that cannot be taken away. Public authorities are expected to respect and encourage the rights of the person and society to, for example, food, shelter, clothing, education, culture, safety and security and rightful freedom, especially with respect to religion.

The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: "The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around." This order is founded on truth, built up in justice, and animated by love. CCC para1912

It means that we as citizens and residents have a participatory role in ensuring that the common good is preserved and maintained by becoming active in the affairs of our nation. But it also implies a certain synergy - that the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts: that together as the body of Christ we can bring unity and wholeness back to our communities and country.

Pope Francis advises that "If we can develop a truly humble attitude, we can change the world." And so, our responsibility lies in truly looking to God to help us start the process of building community and the common good. What can you do?

### Scripture Reflection

"Everything will soon come to an end, so, to pray better, keep a calm and sober mind. Above all, never let your love for each other grow insincere, since love covers over many a sin. Welcome each other into your houses without grumbling. Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourselves at the service of others. If you are a helper, help as though every action was done at God's orders; so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ, since to him alone belong all glory and power forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4: 7-11).

## DAY 13 Rights and Responsibilities

### 3. Rights and Responsibilities

Every person has a fundamental **right to life** and to the **necessities of life**. In addition, every human has the right to what is required **to live a full and decent life**, things such as employment, health care, and education.



*“Freedom exists for the sake of love.”* (St. John Paul II)

We built our foundation of Catholic Social Justice on human dignity and started adding the blocks to the building (Body of Christ) with Community and The Common Good. Our next layer is Rights and Responsibilities. Our human rights as members of an organised, democratic society were given in the first layer.

But it is not a one way street where we simply receive and receive and receive. With rights come responsibilities: the freedom to choose. Freedom is not the ticket to unbridled behaviour, but rather it is the doorway of choice. We are free to choose our path in life, our vocation - keeping in mind that our choices have consequences.

Choosing one path means that another is closed – temporarily or permanently. It is possible to return or restart not at the beginning but along the way - in choosing. *Love* must underpin all our words and action. Freedom must be grounded in love: healthy self-love, love for others, love for God and love for creation. The model and example of such freedom grounded in love is, of course, Jesus.

#### **Prayer:**

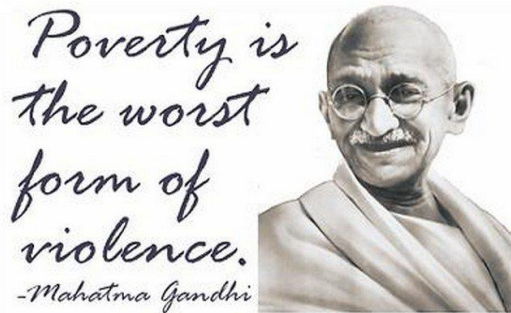
Heavenly Father, even as we pattern our lives by choosing the path that leads to you, help us, Lord to love unconditionally and with compassion.

#### **Scripture Reflection**

“The virtuous man is concerned for the rights of the poor, the wicked knows no such concern” (Proverbs 29:7)

“We are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it” (Ephesians 2:10).

## DAY 14 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



*“Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those people throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger.” St. Teresa of Calcutta*

The word ‘option’ implies choice or alternative but really, there is no option, choice or alternative in assisting the poor, the weak, the oppressed, the hungry, the sick, the needy, the abused, the disabled in our community and society.

It is part of our Christian call and walk. It is the command of Jesus in the Gospel story of The Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), repeated by the Church in the seven Spiritual Works of Mercy. It is our privilege and honour to serve those who cannot return the favour – to satisfy their hunger and thirst: physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological; to bind their wounds of suffering and despair; to clothe their nakedness of desperation and humiliation and to offer comfort and companionship.

Lent provides us with the ideal opportunity to create that “kindness” ecosystem to fulfill our mandate of Psalm 41:1-3 – “Happy are those concerned for the lowly and poor; when misfortune strikes, the LORD delivers them. The LORD keeps and preserves them, makes them happy in the land, and does not betray them to their enemies.”

What’s your kindness legacy? Is it about pandering to your ego or is it the holistic love we see portrayed in God’s word and in Jesus’ life? What’s your choice?

### Scripture Reflection

- Exodus 22:20-26 : You shall not oppress the poor or vulnerable. God will hear their cry.
- Leviticus 19:9-10: A portion of the harvest is set aside for the poor and the stranger.
- Job 34:20-28: The Lord hears the cry of the poor.
- Proverbs: 31:8-9: Speak out in defense of the poor.
- Sirach 4:1-10: Don’t delay giving to those in need.
- Isaiah 25:4-5: God is a refuge for the poor.
- Isaiah 58:5-7: True worship is to work for justice and care for the poor and oppressed.
- Matthew 25:34-40: What you do for the least among you, you do for Jesus.
- Luke 4:16-21: Jesus proclaims his mission: to bring good news to the poor and oppressed.
- Luke 6: 20-23: Blessed are the poor, theirs is the kingdom of God.
- 1 John 3:17-18: How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s good and sees one in need and refuses to help?



## DAY 15 Participation



*“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27*

Each person has a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. This is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity, that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. Participation allows for the majority and the minority voices to be heard and recognised.

Such participation allows for the further development of the community and the society as it makes room for change and continued progress. Exclusion of any person or group based on any pretence of differing beliefs, ethnicity, economic status or otherwise is wrong.

It means that the excluded ones are being treated as non-persons or non-human beings and this exclusion violates their human dignity. Created in the image of God, we are all equal and so share equally in the conduct of the affairs in our society and nation. St Paul tells us that we are no longer slaves; we are better than slaves, we are brothers and sisters and, as such, we are heirs (Philemon 1:16; Galatians 4:7). So we share the same kinship and inheritance as our brothers and sisters and are entitled to participate fully in the life of our nation/world.

If, as they say, we are the only bibles some persons will read, then, are we creating avenues for inclusion by the way in which we live our lives? Are we so humbled by our relationship with our Father who art in heaven that we draw nigh unto us those who wish to participate in a life with Christ?

Now is the time!

### **Scripture Reflection**

In the wilderness justice will come to lie

And integrity in the fertile land;

Integrity will bring peace,

Justice give lasting security. Isaiah 32:16-17

## DAY 16 Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers



We are now on the sixth layer of our building. Included in our human dignity is the dignity of work and rights of workers. The Church has produced a number of encyclicals and documents on this topic on work including: *The Church in the Modern World* (Gaudium et Spes), *On Human Work* (Laborem Exercens) and *A Call to Action* (Octogesima Adveniens).

“As the Church solemnly reaffirmed in the recent Council, "the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person." All people have the right to work, to a chance to develop their qualities and their personalities in the exercise of their professions, to equitable remuneration which will enable them and their families "to lead a worthy life on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level" and to assistance in case of need arising from sickness or age.” *A Call to Action* (Octogesima Adveniens ) #14

Work is necessary for human development and participation in society and such work must be justly remunerated. Unemployment or underemployment undermines the social fabric of the individual, family and community. Allied to this is the freedom to form associations, such as labour unions and cooperatives. In our quest for a more just society, it is imperative that barriers such as the profit margin not be placed on employment but to the full utilisation of skills, training and experience so that the rights of workers are respected.

### **Prayer:**

Help us, Lord, to understand our role in the world of work - be it as employer or employee, so that all our interactions are based on creating win-win, respectful outcomes for the development of the dignity of the human person.

### **Scripture Reflection:** Timothy 6:17-19

“Warn those who are rich in this world’s goods that they are not to look down on other people; and not to set their hopes on money, which is untrustworthy, but on God who, out of his riches, gives us all that we need for our happiness. Tell them that they are to do good, and be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share – this is the way they can save up a good capital sum for the future if they want to make sure of the only life that is real”.

## DAY 17 Stewardship of Creation



We are responsible for caring for the earth, using its resources wisely, and preserving these resources for future generations.

*“Then the LORD God placed man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it.” Genesis 2:15*

Being a caretaker for a single property is quite a task, but when that responsibility extends to all of God’s creation, that is an awesome responsibility. And yet, that is exactly what God expects of us – not just to be caretakers, but stewards of his creation - people, animals, vegetation, water, natural resources and the earth itself. A steward’s job is to manage the land and property of another. In this instance, the challenge is to manage the land and property of the Creator. We are called to be stewards – that is one of our primary vocations. In such a role we are called to protect people and the planet and to live our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. We are called to manage the resources of the planet, not to misuse, abuse and overuse those resources.

One of the best known passages on stewardship is Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27). In it, the master rewards the stewards who managed well the resources He committed to their care, and punished those who did not. Those stewards whom God rewarded as faithful, and whose stewardship was expanded, were careful, committed and intentional about using the Master's resources for His purposes. God is pleased with disciplined, not careless, stewardship of that which belongs to Him, and He expects the same of us.

What say you as to your role of stewardship over creation, your children, your relationships? Will God be pleased?

**Scripture Reflection:** Psalm 24: 1-2

“To God belong earth and all it holds, the world and all who live in it; he himself founded it on the ocean, based it firmly on the nether sea”.

Jeremiah 2:7: “I brought you to a fertile country to enjoy its produce and good things; but no sooner had you entered than you defiled my land, and made my heritage detestable”.

## DAY 18 Solidarity



*“Solidarity is a call to recognise each individual person as a part of one human family.”* Pope Paul VI

*“Jesus wept.”* John 11:35

We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. After Cain killed his brother Abel, and God asked Cain where his brother was, the response was: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4: 9). The answer is a resounding YES. We are one human family, whatever our various differences. Solidarity means that "loving our neighbour" is not only for those in our vicinity or community, or for those whom we like, but solidarity has global implications in our interdependent world. It means being concerned for people where ever they live. In the Gospel of John we are told that Jesus wept with Martha and Mary at the death of their brother, Lazarus. He felt compassion and solidarity with them in their grief and was moved to do something to ease their pain. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and restored him to his family. We may not be able to accomplish such a feat, but we are called to raise people from their places of death – places of suffering, grief, despair, loss - through our prayers and actions, and move them to ‘resurrection’, freedom and life.

### **Prayer:**

Lord as we walk this Lenten path to wholeness, help us also to find solidarity in the Stations of the Cross as you traveled to Calvary; solidarity in your anguish and suffering, so we may find solidarity in the victory of your Resurrection.

### **Scripture Reflection:** Philippians 2:1-5 Preserve unity in humility

If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody s to be self-effacing. Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people’s interest instead. In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus.

## DAY 19 Role of Government



The role of Government is to protect and promote human dignity and human rights, build the common good, and assist citizens in fulfilling their responsibility to themselves and to others in society.

It is an extension of Jesus' command to love one another and bear one another's burden. In some situations it may not be possible to live out those responsibilities as an individual or group. In trying to live out that command, we may not have the resources, tools, techniques or expertise. In such instances we, as citizens, need the help of government in fulfilling these responsibilities and promoting the common good. Of course, Government has a responsibility to use the resources of the nation to promote integral human development.

Promoting the common good should not be attempted within the context of partisanship, favours, votes and monetary kickbacks, but must reflect ethics and morality in all areas. Good governance is always for the people, by the people and of the people. Good governance promotes the development and progress of people. People must come first. Discernment is required by both the individual or group as to what level of involvement is required by the Government and discernment is also required by the State as to how much involvement is truly needed at local levels.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, where people come first, then you should also come first. Help us dear Lord, to advocate for good governance, through prayerful intercession in your name. Amen.

### **Scripture Reflection: Timothy 2: 2-3**

“...first of all, there should be prayers offered for everyone – petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving – and especially for kings and others in authority, so that they may be able to live religious and reverent lives in peace and quiet”.

## DAY 20 Promotion of Peace



*“Charity gives but justice changes.”*

Isaiah 58:6-10;

*“Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard”.*

We have erected the building and placed a roof on it, but the finishing touch is PEACE. Peace is both the glue that holds the building together and the result of all the interactions of the other social justice principles working in tandem to create synergy.

As St. John Paul II remarked, “peace is not the absence of war”. Rather peace and the promotion of peace require daily, constant effort from you and me. As people of the Beatitudes; as a people of hope, Catholics believe that *peace* is possible. However, *peace* will not be achieved if we remain in our comfort zones and fail to take action to build God’s Kingdom. Peace-making is an active process. And Pope Francis says in his 2017 Peace Message: “If violence has its source in the human heart, then it is fundamental that nonviolence be practised before all else within families... The politics of nonviolence have to begin in the home and then spread to the entire human family. Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures that break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (5).

The words of one of my favourite hymns echo this demand: “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me”. Peace has to begin with me. I cannot expect of another what I won’t and don’t do myself. My words and actions should and must reflect the Christ in me as I respect the Christ in others. Justice is the only way to achieving that peace: loving and caring for others as Christ loves and cares for me. So that by our actions, our lives radiate the *peace* we receive.

**Prayer:** Help us, Lord, to make the choice to promote unconditional peace and justice, even when we are outnumbered or vilified; for with Christ we are the majority and we are peacemakers.

### Scripture Reflection

“...never yield to evil, practice good, seek peace, pursue it.” (Psalm 34:14)

“...may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body.” (Colossians 3:15)

## DAY 21 Life and Dignity of the Human Person



*“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:31)*

Is your life important to you? Most likely the answer will be: “Yes!” Therefore, why would the life of any other person on this planet be any less important? As Christians we are compelled to see Christ in all, not some, not only those whom we love or those who seem worthy of being protected, but in EVERYONE.

Imagine for a minute if the image of Christ appeared every time we looked at our brothers and sisters. Will we treat them differently?

We must firmly believe that every person is valuable/of worth, whatever their perceived condition; that people are more important than possessions, and that the true measure of every institution depends on whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, as we see you in every face, help us also to find Your dignity in every human being; even when those persons annoy, distress and disturb us. Help us to push beyond our humanity to find Your divinity in your children here on earth, so as we extend dignity, we too shall receive dignity.

### **Scripture Reflection: Jeremiah 1:5**

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations”.

## DAY 22 Call to Family, Community, and Participation



*What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like. - Saint Augustine*

No matter the continent, no matter the culture, no matter the era, human beings seek out each other in community. We gather to celebrate life; we gather to mourn loss and we gather to worship. Humans are social creatures; it is our nature to be so.

While we seem to embrace our individuality more than ever, we also understand that we are members of a group. It is imperative that we become both. The human race can only survive if its individual members survive, and the individual needs the group to enhance its own chances of survival.

It is a tightly interwoven connection and it defines all that we do. The family is the first example of this. The role of the family involves the rearing of children, being a social agent for love and belonging, carrying on traditions, and producing functional human beings who can contribute positively to their communities/world.

Our identity as Catholics and the continuity of our Church depends on our participation in society. We must see it as a right and a duty to participate in society, so, together, we can build the common good and promote the well-being of all with love and compassion - especially the poor and vulnerable.

**Prayer:** Even as we continue to seek your face, Oh Lord, guide us to be contributors to our community and not detractors. Mould us, Lord, take captive our thoughts, so that we may develop after your own image as stewards working towards the common good.

### **Scripture Reflection: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

“Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people’s sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes”.



## DAY 23 Rights and Responsibilities



*“As all human beings are, in my view, creatures of God's design, we must respect all other human beings. That does not mean I have to agree with their choices or agree with their opinions, but indeed I respect them as human beings.”* (Stockwell Day)

To protect human rights is to ensure that people receive some degree of decent, humane treatment. Violation of the most basic human rights denies individuals of their fundamental moral entitlements.

It is, in a sense, to treat them as if they are less than human and undeserving of respect and dignity.

Human rights are built upon human dignity, which comes from the fact that man is made in the image and likeness of God and is called to communion with God.

So if we were to bring this concept about human rights closer to home, what would we find? Do we treat our spouses with respect and dignity? Do we, as parents, interact with our children as though they are God's creation? Do we as children honour our parents? In short, are our lives reflective of the *isms* we speak?

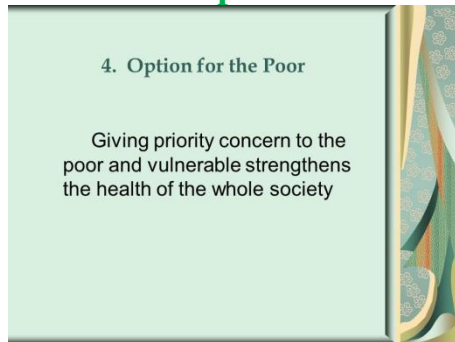
### **Prayer:**

Guide us, Heavenly Father, through this Lenten period, to a place of discernment, where we may become more open to the power of the Holy Spirit as we reposition our lives, with Your guidance, to respect the rights of all you created.

### **Scripture Reflection:** Zechariah 7:9-10

God said: Apply the law fairly, and practice kindness and compassion towards each other. Do not oppress the widow and the orphan, the settler and the poor man, and do not secretly plan evil against one another.

## DAY 24 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



*“Please, sir, may I have some more?”* This is a line taken from the nineteenth century novel, *Oliver Twist*, written by Charles Dickens. It portrays the miserable existence of an orphan boy and also highlighted the exploitation of the poor in society.

This simple line sums up the reality for many in our society so many decades later.

Poverty and the exploitation of the poor and other vulnerable members of our society remains a blemish on the tapestry of humanity.

Although we are living in a time of abundance and technological advancements, humans still struggle for an equal/equitable distribution of the earth’s resources. Many are still waiting for their slice of the pie, which, mainly due to greed and individualism, seems to be in the possession of the select few, leaving others with their hands out pleading for some/more.

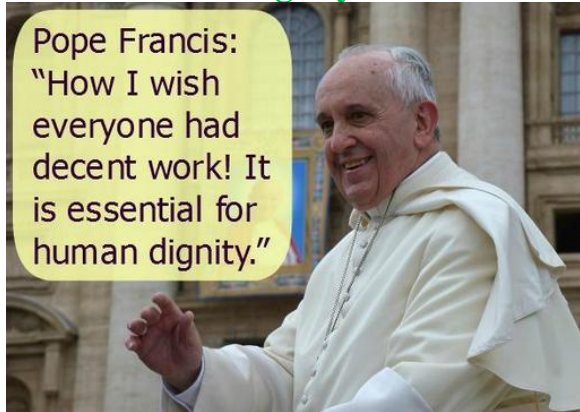
In a world marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our Catholic faith calls on its faithful to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable urgently. Matthew 25.31-46 makes it clear that at the Last Judgment we will be judged according to how we responded to the hungry, the thirsty and so on.

So will you give more to the poor and vulnerable? The calypsonian, The Mighty Shadow, reminded us in a calypso that “Poverty is hell!” Our Church asks us to have a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. This Lent let us not just “give charity”; let us find creative ways also to teach people how to fish, instead of giving them a fish.

**Prayer:** Father of the poor, help us to turn to You today to ask your mercy on all who suffer and cannot provide for themselves. Help us to be the hands and feet of Christ that reach out to help Your children. Show us how we can help to bring an end to poverty in our community, in our country and in this world.

**Scripture Reflection:** James 2:14-16: “Take the case, my brothers, of someone who has never done a single good act but claims that he has faith. Will that faith save him? If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, ‘I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty’, without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead.”

## DAY 25 The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers



*“By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made.” (Genesis 3:19)*

From the very beginning we are told we must work to provide for ourselves and our families. Therefore, God is telling us that we must participate in his Creation by working.

The dignity of work allows individuals within society to participate in the growth of the nation, to build strong economies, to be productive and to contribute to the betterment of all.

If the dignity of work is to be secured, then the basic rights of workers must be respected, for example, the right to decent and fair wages, to be able to organize and join unions, and to decent conditions of work.

Our God-given talents allow all of us to contribute to our world to build the common good.

Pope Francis has said that dignity is not found in power, money, or culture, but in work, in honest work. “Not paying a just [wage], not providing work, focusing exclusively on the balance books, on financial statements, only looking at making personal profit. That goes against God!”

### **Prayer:**

Help us, Oh Lord, to see work as part of human dignity and to see ourselves as integral to that process; respecting every worker in your vineyard. Help us to fight for the dignity of work and for the rights of workers in our country and in the world.

### **Scripture Reflection:** 2 Thessalonians 3: 11-12

“Now we hear that there are some of you who are living in idleness, doing no work themselves but interfering with everyone else’s. In the Lord Jesus Christ, we order and call on people of this kind to go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat”.

## DAY 26 Solidarity

WE ARE ALL PART OF GODS FAMILY.



WE SHOULD DO WHAT WE CAN TO MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS AROUND THE WORLD.

*“Solidarity is a call to recognise each individual person as a part of one human family.”* Pope Paul VI.

Why should it matter to us what is happening to others? The simple answer is, because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

Solidarity helps us see other people and nations as all part of the human family, allowing us to connect and unify with others in their triumphs and their pain.

Catholic Social Teaching sees “Solidarity” as a moral and social virtue. “This is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people both far and near. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (The Social Concern of the Church, 38).

We can unite to make a difference in the lives of our brothers and sisters, for we share the same Father. Through our faith, we are often challenged to redefine our concept of neighbour, remembering always that every person, regardless of how different he/she might seem to be, is also a child of God, and therefore our brother or sister.

This knowledge should spur us on us to play our part to ensure that our “family” flourishes; that we can connect and unite with them in their joys, as well as in their trials and tribulations - to make a difference in their lives.

In this fast paced, interconnected global environment, with internet, Facebook, Skype, etc. we are also now concerned for our family wherever they may live....talk about our brother’s and sister’s keeper!!!!!!

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with understanding that we may discern the concept of brotherly/sisterly solidarity, and be able to empathise with others, and fearlessly work to promote their well-being, as well as our own.

**Scripture Reflection** Galatians 3: 27-28: “All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus”.

## DAY 27 Care for God's Creation

### Catholic Social Teaching

#### Care for God's Creation

- We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation.
- Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith.
- We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

I once saw an interesting quotation on *Caring for the Earth*. It read, "Take care of the earth one day you shall return to it."

In Genesis 3:19 it states "...for dust you are and to dust you will return." God entrusted the first humans the responsibility for caring for Creation. The earth is on loan to us. Should we not care for it while we are here so that we can leave a better planet for generations to come? Or do we prefer our children to inherit a world that is worse than the one we met?

Caring for the environment is an essential element of participating in God's creation, for He has given to us everything we need so that we can live life to the fullest.

Pope Benedict XVI's words uttered on World Youth Day 2008, are worth reflecting on: "Perhaps reluctantly we come to acknowledge that there are also scars which mark the surface of our earth: erosion, deforestation, the squandering of the world's mineral and ocean resources in order to fuel an insatiable consumption. Some of you come from island nations whose very existence is threatened by rising water levels; others from nations suffering the effects of devastating drought. God's wondrous creation is sometimes experienced as almost hostile to its stewards, even something dangerous. How can what is 'good' appear so threatening?"

**Prayer:** Lord, in your wisdom and kindness, forgive us for the mess we have made with your creation. Open our eyes to see the folly of our ways and inspire us to take responsibility for the earth and all that is in it.

#### Scripture Reflection: Psalm 95:5

"...from depths of earth to mountain top everything comes under his rule, the sea belongs to him, he made it, so does the land, he shaped this too".

## DAY 28 Participation



The game of life has two actors – the participant and the spectator....pick one!

The Social Doctrine of the Church states that “participation” is one of the pillars of a democratic system. We must see it as a right and a duty to participate in society, so we can seek out together the common good and well-being of all, with love and compassion – especially with respect to the poor and vulnerable.

Sometimes we take a back seat, assume the role of spectator and say nothing. And then there are those who are vocal and are free enough to participate. How many persons followed Jesus, saw the miracles and stayed quiet? Even Peter stayed quiet about knowing the Lord.

Are we ready to come out of our comfort zone and participate in the fullness of Christ?

Participation allows our voices to be heard and recognised, allowing for further development of our community, Church and State; making room for change, where necessary, and for continued progress.

As a spectator, you may run the risk of becoming a voiceless person, an excluded person, an excluded person. This can compromise your human dignity. Created in the image of God, we are all equal and all have the capacity to share in the conduct of the affairs of our society, Church and nation – using the unique gifts and talents given to us by God.

So let your voice be heard. Speak up; speak up for Christ; speak up for your communities; speak up for justice, peace, truth, love and freedom, and become a participant in society rather than being a spectator.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to find the sound of my voice. Help me not to be intimidated by the sounding brass and clashing cymbals around me, but to find my courage in Christ.

**Scripture Reflection:** Matthew 16:24: “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me’”.

## DAY 29 Role of Government



To govern or not to govern!

To ethically and morally provide the building blocks of society through the provision of quality social services, employment, education, health care, transportation and so on; striving always to ensure a decent standard of living for all. There lies the rub.....can we say that these needs are being met?

Too often we drive through rural communities where social amenities are lacking. Running water, proper roads and drainage are provided spasmodically and communities are left to the mercy of the next political campaign.

Jesus came not to be served, but to serve. As His followers, we are called to be servant leaders in God's vineyard. Too often, our Leaders forget what this means by the way they exercise power/authority. The challenge for us is to identify situations of injustice and exploitation around us and to strive to restore God's original design of equality/equity and right relationships in our homes, communities and nation.

We need to look at the building blocks of: participation, solidarity, community, the common good, rights of workers, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, and ensure that we work with Government, civil society, including other faith-based organizations, to meet the needs of our people. In many ways, good governance depends on all of us.

**Prayer:** As we seek your face during these forty days, grant us, Oh Lord, your gift of discernment. Fill us with wisdom and enable us to find innovative ways to speak out and stand up against domination/exploitation, and promote the restoration of right relationships. Lord, we know that good governance is about people and the environment – your Creation. Lead our governments to embrace accountability, transparency, and integrity. Inspire them to rule wisely.

**Scripture Reflection:** 1 Timothy 2:1-3

“My advice is that, first of all, there should be prayers offered for everyone – petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving –and especially for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live religious and reverent lives in peace and quiet”.

## DAY 30 Promotion of Peace



*“When peace like a river attendeth my soul, when sorrow no longer assail. Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul”!*

The words of this popular hymn ring in my head as meditations on *peace* occupy my mind. How do we get peace to *attend our soul*, when there are so many distractions, challenges and issues bombarding our psyche? Shalom, the Hebrew word for *Peace*, means fullness or completeness, and helps to explain the theme of *Peace* much better because it isn’t just an absence of war or conflict that creates *peace*, but a complete trust in Jesus and affinity between people.

Remember the saying: *Let Go and Let God*. Paul encourages in Phillipians 3:14, to press forward toward the prize that is Jesus, forgetting whatever distractions exist to the right or left. That is the challenge if we want to achieve fullness and completion in Christ; if we want to achieve peace.

It’s all about understanding that there is no situation larger than Christ; that there is no place to hide from his love and that if we seek his Kingdom first we will be well on the path to holiness. If we hold on to Him, He will lighten our burdens and make our yoke easy. This confidence, therefore, makes it easier to be transformed into that place where **peace** can attend to our soul and make us victors in Christ.

Pope Francis’ Peace Message for 2017 reminds us that “Jesus himself lived in violent times. Yet he taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for ‘it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come’ (*Mk 7:21*). But Christ’s message in this regard offers a radically positive approach. He unfailingly preached God’s unconditional love, which welcomes and forgives...To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence” (3).

**Prayer:** Lord, please order our steps to the throne of Your amazing grace; Your amazing love, and bless us with the gift to surrender all to you, in exchange for your enduring *peace*.

**Scripture Reflection:** Psalm 34:13-14

Malice must be banished from your tongue,

Deceitful conversation from your lips;

never yield to evil, practice good, seek peace, pursue it.





## DAY 32 Community and The Common Good



### **FIND YOUR NICHE!**

If, as they say, a healthy nation starts with you, then the family, then the community, then the nation, what is your role in realising your own potential, building community, and promoting the common good.

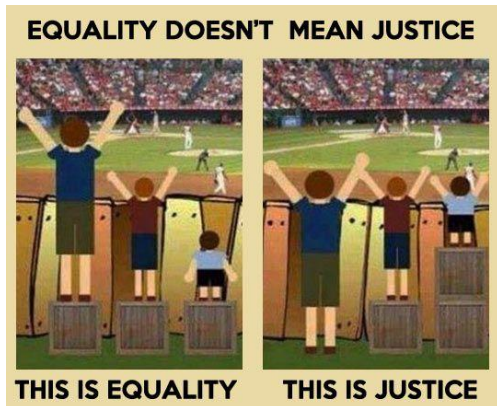
Community is not something that just ‘happens’. Each of us has our work cut out for us to ensure that we build strong communities. The values of truth, freedom, justice, peace, respect and love, form the mantra to be sung each new day as we look to the Light of the World for guidance. ‘Putting these values into practice is the sure and necessary way of obtaining personal perfection and a more human social existence.’ (Compendium, paragraph 197).

Life, Trinidad politics, crime, unemployment, the cost of living, all have the tendency to leave us feeling so disillusioned that at times it’s difficult to think about *community and the common good* when we are just trying to survive. Pope Francis exhorts us to keep our eyes fixed on Christ - not on the soap opera that is Trini politics, crime and all the madness around us, and Christ himself will make *hope* grow. Even as we keep our eyes on the prize that is Jesus, let us thank him for revealing our purpose, our gifts, our talents, so that we can indeed live the values of the Holy Spirit and make a positive contribution to our family, community, country and world.

That *hope* is what we cling to when we look to the scripture at Romans 12: 4-12 to be the light in our path: “*Just as each of our bodies has several parts and each part has a separate function, so all of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other. Our gifts differ according to the grace given us. If your gift is prophecy, then use it as your faith suggests; if administration, then use it for administration; if teaching, then use it for teaching. Let the preachers deliver sermons, the almsgivers give freely, the officials be diligent, and those who do works of mercy do them cheerfully.*”

**Scripture Reflection:** Amos 5:14-15: “Seek good and not evil so that you may live, and that God of Sabaoth, may really be with you as you claim he is. Hate evil, love good, maintain justice at the city gate, and it may be that God of Sabaoth, will take pity on the remnant of Joseph”.

## DAY 33 Rights and Responsibilities



And I say to myself, what a wonderful world!  
Oh yeah a wonderful world!

Well if God made me to love and serve Him and live in harmony with the universe, then why we mashing up de place so? Why we throwing bottles out we car and dumping fridges in de water? Why we beating up we chirren an we wife? Why we thieving from one another? Why we killing we neighbours?

If God made me in His image, why we find it hard to give an honest day's work and reach out and treat the disabled with empathy?

With rights comes responsibilities, and Isaiah 1:16-17 teaches us to "Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow", for to claim one's rights and ignore one's duties, or only half fulfil them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other. (*Peace on Earth*, Pope St John XXIII, 1963).

Our responsibilities as *salt of the earth* involve active participation in our duty of care to our families, our neighbours/communities, our environment, our Church and our places of employment. It cannot be business as usual when God is in the equation!

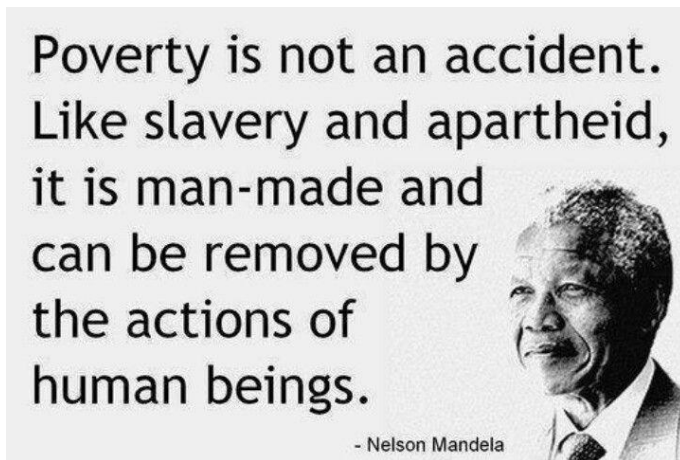
Let us this day, as we go about our daily duties, pray for the eyes of discernment, to see the opportunity which God presents to be His agent, His child – made in His image; to boldly step out of our comfort zone; to reach out and make a difference in the lives of those without a voice, without a champion, without hope.

**Prayer:** Release us Lord, from the prison of our fears, so that we can assume our rightful place in your Kingdom here on earth.

And I say to myself, what a wonderful world!

**Scripture Reflection:** Matthew 20:26-28 - The Call to Servanthood: "Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

## DAY 34 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable



We sing it all the time....”Whatever you do to the least of my people, you do it unto me.”

Selfishness and individualism have taught us to look after ourselves and to weed out the vulnerable and those we perceive to be “the weakest links”. Some call it “collateral damage”.

God’s lessons have taught us that Jesus came for those who are considered to be “collateral damage.” It is the leper, the lame, the homeless, the captive for whom His heart bleeds.

For the Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for He has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord...to comfort all those who mourn...” Isaiah 61, 1-3).

Our father’s call is to unlearn what the world has taught us and see life through His lens of justice, peace and love. All his values and virtues are intertwined; all our lives are intertwined - rich and poor, sane and insane are all equal on God’s scale of *human dignity*.

### **Prayer:**

Teach us, dear Lord, to understand that the poor and vulnerable have limited options and ways of shielding themselves and depend on us as conduits of God’s love to give a hand-up not a hand-out.

### **Scripture Reflection: Proverbs 31: 8-9**

“Speak, yourself, on behalf of the dumb, on behalf of all the unwanted; speak, yourself, pronounce a just verdict, uphold the rights of the poor, of the needy”.

## DAY 35 Participation



### Join IN!

Sometimes we get caught in a trap and feel we have nothing to contribute. We tell ourselves we staying in the background, we don't like speaking in public, or we have no "set" of education, and end up with an inferiority complex.

On the other hand, we have critics who "pushy" and run to take the lead in everything, who refuse to give young people a chance and under whose leadership nobody grows.

Either way, at times it seems as though participation dead and buried; persons, groups, even visitors abandoned to be back seat on-lookers and we say the Church dead.

James 2: 14-17 tells us that our faith is dead if we ignore others in need. Thank God for the risen Christ. We worship a resurrected God who can take dry bones and breathe life back into them.

Our transforming Christian faith enables us to follow Jesus Christ and to bear witness in all we do. Our *Catechism* reminds us to participate - each according to his/her position, talent and role, in promoting the common good.

We are reminded: "As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" (Paras 1913-1915). *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*.

### Prayer:

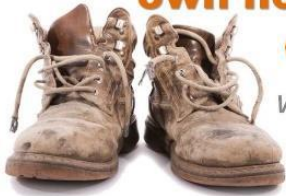
Lord Jesus Christ, transform us to be active participants in our faith and in society, so we can breathe the new life in our homes and communities and become participators in Christ.

### Scripture Reflection Romans 6:3-4

"You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized in his death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life".

## DAY 36 Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers

**“Any necessary work  
that pays an honest  
wage carries its  
own honor and  
dignity.”**



*W. Kelly Griffith*

*And God looked and said it was good.* Can we say the same thing at the end of our work day? Does our output dignify our rights as workers?

God in his infinite mercy and wisdom gave us blueprints for every area of our lives, work notwithstanding. God also saw the value of work/life balance. He stepped back, saw that His work was good, and rested on the seventh day.

That truth is too amazing to comprehend. However if we can wrap our heads around that thought and act on it, then we will find the capacity to also see that our work can be good and make light of the ‘work’ assigned to us. In a strange contradiction, we now have the benefit of technology which allows us to work smart not hard. Yet everywhere you look, “workers” are seriously attached to their phones and always ready to tell you about their long work hours ..... so God could create the entire universe and find time to rest .....ent!

“Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life.” (*Charity in Truth* (Caritas in Veritate), #25)

Giving and receiving are key Christian values and apply no less to the work situation. We have a duty to give a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay. And at all times, let us remember our dignity as workers in the Lord’s vineyard.

Are our efforts dignified? Do we do everything for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)? What are our rights in that vineyard? Deuteronomy 24:14-15 tells us: “Do not withhold wages from your workers, for their livelihood depends on them.”

**Scripture Reflection:** Psalm 127:

“If God does not build the house, in vain the masons toil; if God does not guard the city, in vain the sentries watch”.

## DAY 37 Stewardship of creation



As heirs and joint heirs with Christ, the earth is our legacy, but like we working “real” hard to destroy that gift. Is that considered ungrateful? Are we taking it all for granted? Today when we look around what do we see - landslides, flooding, erosion, pollution, garbage all over the street, rising crime, abuse and disrespect to each other.

Is the abuse to the land and abuse among ourselves linked? If we do not love or respect each other, how can we respect the gift of the earth from the Lord? When someone gives you a special gift, you treasure it, not trample on it and destroy it. What’s the ‘beat’ with us as humans....we lost or what? What are the values that characterise us?

From the earth we came and from the earth we return, so we are the earth. However, in our consumerist society, we supersize everything in an excessive and disordered way creating environmental chaos.

### **Prayer:**

We know that all Creation reveals the nature of God (Romans 1:20). Help us Lord we pray, to recognize our stewardship of Your Creation, so that we do not betray Your will for this earth. In caring for the environment, may we be inspired to care also for our brothers and sisters.

### **Scripture Reflection:** Leviticus 25: 1-4

“The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai; he said: ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them:

‘When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land is to keep a sabbath’s rest for the Lord. For six years you shall sow your field, for six years you shall prune your vine and gather its produce. But in the seventh year the land is to have its rest, a Sabbath for the Lord’”.

## DAY 38 Solidarity



Bob Marley sings... "One love, one love, let's get together and be alright".

Loving unconditionally is what our Father who art in heaven calls us to do. Being there for each other is what we are called to do; picking up the pieces when challenges arise is what we are called to do.

We are not called to love only those who worship where we do. We are not called to love only those who speak just like us and we are not called to support only those in our myopic social circles.

As we look into the mirror of life, we recognize that we are all family, created in our heavenly father's image and likeness and called therefore to embody love in the family of Creation. How then can we get into that space where we look at *love* in the family of Creation? And if Creation is you, is me, is the trees, the universe, then we have a big job ahead of us to move away from selfishness, anger, greed, pollution, indiscriminate farming, and from all activities which destroy people and planet and grieve the Holy Spirit.

In our search for justice and peace within the context of our own search for salvation, we cannot omit the virtue of unconditional love, if we want to see the Father's face. We cannot ignore our solidarity for the environment, or our solidarity for the shades of the many faces we see in the mirror.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to personalize your instructions at Romans 13:8-10 - to live rightly and deeply love and care for one another.

### **Scripture Reflection: Galatians 3:28**

"All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and reek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus".



## DAY 39 The Role of Government



*“Forged from the love of liberty, in the fires of hope and prayer”*. These words from our National Anthem remind us and our Government that at the heart of our democracy is our love of liberty – freedom. In our Anthem we ask God to bless our nation. In this rainbow country of coalition politics, many of us feel God has to be a Trini. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, says it is the proper role of government to “make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life, including food, clothing, health care, education and culture”.

Our dual heritage as faithful Catholics and Trinbagonians place integrity at the heart of good governance. However, it follows that if good governance is about accountability, transparency, responsibility, responsiveness to the needs of people, then our Leaders should also have these qualities, which can promote morals and values that foster responsibility, solidarity and tolerance. For true?

And then we have Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve, who washed the feet of his disciples even when he knew betrayal was at hand. As His followers, we too are called to be servant leaders in God’s vineyard. Too often, though we have Leaders who feel that they are anointed instead of appointed; who by the way they wield power and authority, forget about servant leadership. As citizens who exercise our right to vote, remember always that our help comes from the Lord and it is our Christian values that should help us to evaluate political promises and actions. Let us become advocates of the Church’s Social Teaching and help build a community of salt and light.

O yes, the Government has its role to play in providing amenities and in using the nation’s resources wisely, but we too, as followers of Christ, armed with the practical wisdom of the Gospel, also have a role to find solutions which can bring God back into the equation to create right relationships in our homes, communities and nation - to ease up some of the building frustrations facing so many in our society today.

**Prayer:** In this Lenten season, we pray Lord that your Word will be written on the tablets of our hearts, so we may do as Timothy exhorts for supplications, prayers, intercessions and the giving of thanks to be made for all persons who are in authority, that they may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

### **Scripture Reflection: 1 Chronicles 29:25**

“God brought Solomon’s greatness to its height in the sight of all Israel, and gave him a reign of such splendour as none that had reigned over Israel before him had ever known”.

## DAY 40 Promotion of Peace



Some of us share the sign of peace at Church, then promptly use hand sanitizer thereafter. Like we playing with God or what?

Hear nah, peace is not just that we ain't fighting and fretting yuh know, but that we have some respect and support going on; no skin teeth friendship and as soon as yuh out de window, de "bad talk" start.

Nah man! De children watching, the Holy Spirit grieved and yuh cyah go adoration when yuh heart so full ah bile. Nah man! Free yourself from all that slavery and open the door to wholeness and the fruit of all the goodness promised by God.

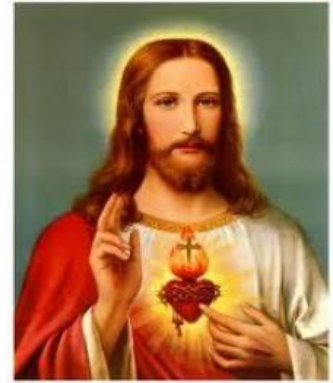
The movement toward peace must involve a movement to truth, love, justice, freedom and forgiveness which are pathways to the fulfillment of love in the Gospels and a personification of our own dignity in Christ.

The more we strive as Christians to resolve our interpersonal challenges according to these truths, the less we place ourselves in situations of abuse and find ourselves in places of divine peace. Let the peace begin with you.

**Prayer:** Thank you Lord, for encouraging us in Colossians 3:9 to clothe ourselves with love. Thank you Lord for the gift of the peace which surpasseth all understanding. May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts.

**Scripture Reflection:** John 16:33: "I have told you all of this So that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, But be brave: I have conquered the world."

Matthew 5:9: "Happy the peacemakers; they shall be called sons of God."



## **Catholic Social Teaching - Key Principles**

**Sanctity of Life & The Dignity of the Human Person**

**Common Good**

**Fundamental Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

**Family & Community**

**Participation in the economic, political, social and cultural life of society.**

**Rights and Responsibilities**

**Economic Justice**

**Environmental Stewardship – Care for God’s Creation**

**Role of Government & Subsidiarity**

**Global Solidarity & Development**

**Social Justice, Commutative Justice, Restorative Justice, Distributive Justice**

**Dignity of work and the Rights of Workers**

**Promotion of Peace and Disarmament**

**Universal Destination of Goods**

# The Two Feet of Love *in Action*

"The conscience is called by this social teaching to recognize and fulfill the obligations of **justice** and **charity** in society."

*—Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 83*

"**Social justice**. . . concerns the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions."

*—Compendium, no. 301*

"The Church cannot neglect the service of **charity** any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. . . . Those who are able to make offerings in accordance with their means. . . to support orphans, widows, the sick, and those who for other reasons find themselves in need, such as prisoners and foreigners."

*—Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, no. 22*



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