

Dear brothers and sisters,

I will be representing CCSJ and AMMR as we all pray through the storm. I will be focusing on the many social ills that beset us.

Lord, too many have turned away from you; too many have forgotten why you made us. But it is never too late for us to repent. We know that you wait for us with open arms. Loving God, we ask you to increase our faith. Give us the gift of mustard seed faith and help those who have strayed from you, to return to your loving arms.

Let us listen to the hymn: Come back to me.

As we pray through the storm,

Let us reflect on CCSJ's Prayer for Justice and Peace. This will be read by Cheryl Wallace.

O God, open our hearts to the gifts of your Holy Spirit as we seek to promote Your reign here in Trinidad and Tobago and in the world.

Help us to become a nation and world where peace is built with justice and justice is guided by love, love of God and love of neighbour.

Help us to rediscover and live our faith so that our concern for social justice will be transformed into constructive action as we spread the Good News in this land.

We ask you, O God, to guide and bless all our efforts.

Inspire us as you did the Prophets of old with courage, imagination, and creativity.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lord, we cannot sit on the side lines in the face of the many **social ills** that beset us in our society and globally. We are guided to act by the many references to Justice in our Scriptures.

Isaiah Chapter 1 Verse 17 states:

"Take your wrong-doing out of my sight, Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, Search for Justice, Help the oppressed, Be just to the orphan, Plead for the widow."

And **Amos** Chapter 5 Verse 24 reads: "... let justice flow like water, And integrity like an unfailing stream."

Heavenly Father, we know that you are a God of justice. **Psalm 99** reminds us that He is "a king who loves justice, insisting on honesty, justice, virtue..."

Lord, we know that when you created us you had a plan. When you made us, you instilled in us a moral compass, but, as you can see from the many social ills in our country and in our world, we are so own-way, that many of us have forgotten that it is this compass that will enable us to live as your disciples. Lord, we recall the famous statement by St. Augustine of Hippo who said:

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Yes, we were made to return to you - once we live according to your commandments. As Archbishop Jason said recently: "Don't **aim** for **Purgatory**, the goal is **Heaven**."

Para 27 in our Catechism tells us: "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for:

"The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he **freely** acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator."

Lord, you give us free will. We can use this to follow Your will, or our own will. You give us the capacity to choose good or evil in our lives. Lord, we know that living gospel values is not 'a piece of cake'. In fact, you told us in Luke chapter 9 verse 23 that there are certain conditions for anyone who wishes to follow you. You said: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me."

Dear Jesus, we know that temptation is always hovering around us, seeking to lead us to stray from your path. But our faith is strong, Lord. We are people of the Beatitudes, we are a Eucharistic people, who will take up our cross daily and follow you. We pray and work to ensure that you are the Light of our lives. We are committed to strive to transform society to reflect Gospel values. Give us the grace to hunger and thirst for what is right, to be gentle, to be merciful, to be pure in heart, to be peacemakers.

Lord, we know that the prophet Amos' words should inform our lives - 5:24 – "... let justice flow like water, And integrity like an unfailing stream." Integrity is a virtue - it means "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness." As Donald Demarco says: "We need integrity to become who we are, so that we can complement God's gift to us with our gift to Him. Although we often lack integrity in ourselves, we are usually quick to recognize and denounce it in others."

Amos urges us to "let justice flow like water." In order to do this, we know Lord, that we need to understand the meaning of justice from a Catholic perspective. Justice is one of the 4 Cardinal virtues. The others being temperance, fortitude, and prudence. Justice is the firm resolve to render each his/her due. Justice, from a Catholic perspective requires us to embrace the fact that there are objective moral norms. In a world in which moral relativism threatens to overwhelm us, Lord, we have to hold fast to this teaching.

When Isaiah 1:17 states: "Take your wrong-doing out of my sight, Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, Search for Justice, Help the oppressed, Be just to the orphan, Plead for the widow", we remember Lord, that unless our consciences are well-formed; unless we truly understand what justice means, we will not learn to do good.

But we are a people of hope. We will not despair, Lord. We will keep engaging in our daily examen. Saint Ignatius insisted on never neglecting the Daily Examen. As Fr. Mark Thibodeaux, SJ says: "In the Examen, we review our recent past to find God and God's blessings in life. We also look back to find moments in the day when things didn't go so well—when we were hurt by something that happened to us, or when we sinned or made a mistake. We give praise and thanksgiving for the blessed moments.

We ask forgiveness and healing for the difficult and painful moments. Having reflected on this past day, we then turn to the day yet to come and ask you, Lord, to show us the potential challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. We try to anticipate which moments might go one way or the other for us: toward your plan or away from it. We ask you for insight into what graces we might need to live this next day well; patience, wisdom, fortitude, self-knowledge, peace, optimism. We ask you, Lord, for that grace, and we trust that you want us to succeed in our day even more than we do." Even when we fall, Lord, we know that the sacrament of reconciliation is there to bring us back to you. Throughout our lives we will continue learning to do good and to avoid evil.

Lord, we want Justice to flow like water, so inspire us to build just communities. We know, Lord, that our Catechism tells us that:

“1928 Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.

1929 Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man *and woman*. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him: What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt. John Paul II, SRS

Heavenly Father, we recall that Former Archbishop Edward Gilbert, reminded the Faithful that we cannot only have a vertical relationship with you, but a horizontal relationship with our neighbours and with Creation. That is, that we should not only be concerned about our own salvation but, as part of your universal family, we have a duty to build your Kingdom which should be inclusive; and since you created us to be stewards of your Creation, Lord, help us to listen to the cry of the earth and change our attitudes and behaviour. Help us to live simply so that others may simply live.

Isaiah 1:17 reminds us of our duty to: "Help the oppressed, Be just to the orphan, Plead for the widow." Lord, we know that being a Catholic means being ready to move out of our comfort zones and becoming advocates for the oppressed and the downtrodden.

This means that we should move from a concern about “I, me and myself”, to “Us”, “We”. Many of the saints have reminded us of this. As St Ambrose said: If you have 2 shirts in your closet, one belongs to you and the other to the man with no shirt.

We are called to care for each other. As is stated in 1 Corinthians: 12

“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

Let us listen to the beautiful hymn: One bread, one body.

Lord, today as we remember some of the social ills/human rights violation in our world today fill us with wisdom so that we will know how to respond.

- there are wars and other conflicts around the world. Pope Francis has said the world is moving forcefully towards ever bigger wars. Last year more than US\$1.9 trillion dollars were spent on weapons for war. In his latest encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, on fraternity and social friendship our Holy Father tells us that in order to establish peace, nations must learn to resolve conflicts through dialogue, and must undergo an “ecological conversion” to protect the environment and foster recognition of our shared humanity.

World conflicts, he says, are “the consequences of our hostility towards others, our lack of respect for our common home or our abusive exploitation of natural resources—seen only as a source of immediate profit, regardless of local communities, the common good and nature itself.”

Conflict “often begins with the inability to accept the diversity of others, which then fosters attitudes of aggrandizement and domination born of selfishness and pride, hatred and the desire to caricature, exclude and even destroy the other.” He says that recognising each other as neighbours is the path to peace, and that “there can be no true peace unless we show ourselves capable of developing a more just economic system”.

Lord, the human community “bears the scars of ever more devastating wars and conflicts”. Pope Francis calls on Christians to reject “the false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust. Mistrust and fear weaken relationships and increase the risk of violence, creating a vicious circle that can never lead to a relationship of peace. Even nuclear deterrence can only produce the illusion of security... Every war is a form of fratricide that destroys the human family’s innate vocation to brotherhood and sisterhood...The desire for peace lies deep within the human heart, and we should not resign ourselves to seeking anything less than this”.

Lord, we remember the words of St Teresa of Calcutta that: “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

As we strive to build peace, let us reflect on Pope Francis’ prayer for peace:

Lord Jesus,

we adore your cross

which frees us from sin, the origin of every division and evil;
we proclaim your resurrection,
which ransoms man from the slavery of failure and death;
we await your coming in glory,
which will bring to fulfilment your kingdom of justice, joy, and peace.

Lord Jesus,

by your glorious passion,
conquer the hardness of our hearts, imprisoned by hatred and selfishness;
by the power of your resurrection,
save the victims of injustice and maltreatment from their suffering;
by the fidelity of your coming,
confound the culture of death and make the triumph of life shine forth.

Lord Jesus,

unite to your cross the sufferings of the many innocent victims:
the children, the elderly, and the persecuted Christians;
envelop in paschal light those who are deeply wounded:
abused persons, deprived of freedom and dignity;
let those who live in uncertainty experience the enduring constancy of your
kingdom: the exiles, refugees, and those who have lost the joy of living.

Lord Jesus,

cast forth the shadow of your cross over peoples at war;
may they learn the way of reconciliation, dialogue, and forgiveness;
let the peoples so wearied by bombing experience the joy of your resurrection:
raise up Iraq and Syria from devastation;
reunite your dispersed children under your gentle kingship:
sustain Christians in the Diaspora and grant them the unity of faith and love.

O Virgin Mary, Queen of peace,

you who stood at the foot of the cross,
obtain from your Son pardon for our sins;
you who never doubted the victory of his resurrection,
sustain our faith and our hope;

you who are enthroned as Queen in glory,
teach us the royal road of service and the glory of love.

Amen.

- Pope Francis, Prayer for Peace at Meeting with the Assyrian-Chaldean Community, 9/30/16

Lord, we ask for your graces to be able to address the many social ills that beset us. As we prepare for Justice, Peace and Community Week which will run from Sat 14 – Sat 21, instill in us a sincere desire to do as Pope Francis has asked – let us “Stretch forth your hand to the poor” (Sirach 7:32).

Lord, we understand that poverty is linked to social exclusion which is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas have a combination of problems, such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, and family breakdown. These problems are linked, they are mutually reinforcing, and can be transmitted from one generation to the next. If Justice is to flow like water, Lord, we know that we need to address the scandal of poverty and social exclusion. Love of neighbour calls us to do as Pope Francis says and love not with words but with deeds.

In a world in which individualism, selfishness, and greed threaten to overwhelm us, Lord, help us to ensure that the values and virtues that underpin our lives are those that have been handed down to us by you in our Scriptures, by the Magisterium, our various Popes in their encyclicals, apostolic exhortations and so on, Pastoral Letters from Episcopal Conferences such as our own Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC).

Lord, The Social Doctrine of our Church outlines a set of social justice principles that should underpin our lives if we are to live as your disciples and follow in your footsteps. Help us to live these principles.

Lord, may the words in the Vatican II document, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, resonate in our hearts and lead us to act: *The joys and the hopes, the griefs, and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.*

...everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus. (Para 1 and para 27 of the 1965) , Gaudium et Spes.

Lord, we know that in our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbour of every person without exception and of actively helping him or her when they come across our path.

Heavenly Father, help us to respond to the teaching the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World that “whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; 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 *and women* 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. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator.”

While we reflect on the importance of the virtue of charity, Lord, we remember the words of St Augustine: “Charity is no substitute for justice withheld”. Pope Pius XI’s words are also pertinent: “Charity will never be true charity unless it takes justice into account ... Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt himself from the great duties imposed by justice.”

Pope Francis reminds us of our duties to engage both in spiritual and corporal works of mercy as well as works of social action (the promotion of justice). He rightly said: “None of us can think we are exempt from concerns for the poor and for social justice... Jesus tells us what the ‘protocol’ is, on which we will be judged. It is the one we read in chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel.”

"As long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Lord, we know that Charity involves more than feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. We must address the root causes of injustice/social problems by being social justice advocates.

Lord, we know that there are too many people living on the margins of society - in TT and around the world. Charity alone will not build just societies; it will not transform society. Creating a just society involves promoting authentic integral human development - that is, the development of each person, and of every dimension of the person. Help us to promote the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that our people need to live as productive citizens in the 21st century.

St Teresa of Calcutta was a model of charity, while Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a true advocate of social action – addressing unjust laws, policies, practices, and political action. St Teresa rightly said: “What you can do, I can’t do, and what I can do, you can’t do, but together we can do something beautiful for God.”

Lord, we know that you require both kinds of advocates.

When we give money to the person begging on the streets, we are seeking to meet his/her immediate, short-term needs. We need to start asking the question: “Why are the poor poor?” as Archbishop Dom Helder Camara did. The economy should work for the benefit of all, but distributive justice remains a forlorn dream. Lord, we know that Pope Francis is correct when he says: “No-one can remain insensitive to the inequalities that persist in the world!”

Help us, Lord, to combat individuality, selfishness and indifference and open our eyes to what it means to be people of faith. For Christians, to be Christ-like is to act as you did. Your mandate is outlined in Luke Chapter 4 Verse 18:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”

Lord, help us to stand in solidarity with those in need in our communities - the homeless, indigent, elderly, lonely, sick, shut-ins. Show us the many ways in which we can promote charity and justice.

Inspire us as we reflect on the messages that Pope Francis sends to us in his recently released encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on fraternity and social friendship. Our Christian hope propels us to build solidarity and right relationships among all peoples.

(Fr. William McCormick rightly says that)

The Good Samaritan is seen as the exemplar of the solidarity called for in Fratelli Tutti. Pope Francis points to the Good Samaritan as an 'icon for our time.' 'Jesus' parable summons us to rediscover our vocation as citizens of our

respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond; neighbours in solidarity with the suffering and vulnerable.'

We know Lord, as one writer says, a solidarity that grows to embrace 'the common good of all people,' regardless of their country or creed, can only begin with each person's interactions with those immediately in his/her life through a 'culture of encounter' (FT, 216-217).

While the task ahead of us may seem daunting, Lord, we truly believe that each of us can make a difference. As St Teresa of Calcutta said: "What you can do, I can't do, and what I can do, you can't do; but together, we can do something beautiful for the Lord."

Lord, help us to discern what we must do to address the many social ills that plague society/our world. Help us to embrace the vision of "fraternity" that the Holy Father lays out in his recent encyclical. Bless our efforts as we seek to build your Kingdom of justice, truth, love, freedom, and forgiveness, which are the pillars of peace.

So, Lord, as we continue praying through the storm, lead us to take our wrongdoing out of your sight, cease to do evil. Learn to do good, Search for Justice, Help the oppressed, Be just to the orphan, and Plead for the widow.

Give us the grace to do what is necessary so that justice will flow like water, And integrity like an unfailing stream. (Amos)

May we be true witnesses to you by the way we live and the example that we give. Help us to anchor our ministry in prayer. St Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that we must pray without ceasing. Archbishop Jason Gordon reminds us that "Prayer for the Christian is like water for fish...to pray is to realise the truth that we are in God: in Him we live and move and have our being."
And as we pray, let us never forget that the Lord raises us up daily. He never abandons.

Let us listen to the wonderful Hymn You raise me up.

I end with a prayer for justice:

Father, you have given all peoples one common origin.
It is your will that they be gathered together

as one family in yourself.

Fill the hearts of humankind with the fire of your love
and with the desire to ensure justice for all.

By sharing the good things you give us,
may we secure an equality and equity for all
our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

May there be an end to division, strife and war.

May there be a dawning of a truly human society
built on love and peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen