



Lord, when did we see you hungry

MATTHEW 25:37

CATECHETICAL SUNDAY 2024

Title: Feeding the Hungry by Putting Our Two Feet of Love in Action

The Eucharist propels us forth to build “a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God’s plan” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20). How can we put faith in action to address poverty and inequality in our communities? As missionary disciples, we walk with the complementary “feet” of charitable works and social justice. These two feet of love in action provide tangible ways to respond to the face of Christ in the least of our brothers and sisters in need (“Lord, when did we see you hungry” - Mt 25:37).

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Bio:

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“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”



These are my favorite words of dismissal at the end of Mass because they call to mind the missionary nature of the people of God. Having received Christ in the Eucharist, we go forth to become bread, broken for others, as a means of proclaiming the Gospel.

Our participation in the Eucharist makes us “witnesses of God’s compassion towards all our brothers and sisters,” Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Sacramentum Caritatis* (*The Sacrament of Charity*), no. 88. This includes “service of charity towards neighbor,” since “in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know.” Furthermore, “the Eucharist compels all who believe in him to become ‘bread that is broken’ for others, and to work for a more just and fraternal world.”

What an inspiring proclamation of our Eucharistic mission in the world! Pope Benedict XVI’s two-pronged invitation—“service of charity towards neighbor” and “work for a more just and fraternal world”—is helpful as we discern our response to the challenge of Matthew 25:37 (“Lord, when did we see you hungry?”). As missionary disciples who seek to “live” the Eucharist in our communities, how are we to respond to the realities of hunger and poverty in our world today? By putting Two Feet of Love in Action.

Putting Two Feet of Love in Action

The Two Feet of Love in Action describe two distinct, but complementary, ways we can seek to address issues like hunger and poverty.

One “foot” is called **charitable works** (also known as *service* or *charity*). When we walk with this foot, we seek to address immediate or basic needs, or to provide emergency assistance to help those in need. Charitable Works are our “response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 31).

We act with love and mercy towards those in need as a direct response to Jesus’ invitation in Matthew 25 to serve him in those who are hungry, naked, sick, or imprisoned. Examples of charitable works include: donating to food pantries, serving at soup kitchens, assisting with disaster relief, welcoming newcomers, ministering to people who are elderly, incarcerated, or disabled, and providing spiritual support or counseling for those who are struggling. Catholic Charities agencies, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Catholic Relief Services, and countless communities of men and women religious offer the essential witness of charity through their accompaniment of vulnerable people at home and around the world.

In the words of Pope Francis, “it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter” that can allow us “to restore hope and bring about renewal” in our broken world (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 30). In addition to caring for important needs, charitable works can provide rich opportunities for encounter. When organizing opportunities for service for youth and adults alike, [these best practices can help foster an atmosphere of encounter that is positive and transformative](#) for those who serve and for those being served.

The other “foot” is *social justice*. We “step” with social justice when we strive to understand the underlying or “root” causes of the issues that affect many people, and then work to change systems or structures in order to address them. We ask questions such as: Why are there so many people who experience poverty and food insecurity? What factors prevent people from having access to what they need in order to thrive? How do certain policies or structures *help* or *worsen* the situation? Who benefits from the way things are? Whose voices are missing around the table? According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, “Social justice . . . concerns the social, political and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions” (no. 201).

Here are some examples of stepping with the “foot” of social justice to respond to the call of Matthew 25:37 (“Lord, when did we see you hungry?”):

- **Educate yourself and others about poverty’s “root” causes.** For example, did you know that many poor, urban communities are [food deserts](#) with little access to grocery stores or fresh produce? The [PovertyUSA.org](#) website can help you to understand poverty and some of its causes in your community and across the U.S. You can also learn about [policies that can help solve hunger in the U.S.](#) and about issues that [impact vulnerable people around the world](#).
- **Advocate with elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels** for policies that help individuals and families in the U.S. and around the world to overcome poverty and hunger. State Catholic conferences often offer opportunities for legislative advocacy. At the federal level, you can join your voice with many through action alerts via email or text with [USCCB](#), [Catholic Charities USA](#), [Catholic Relief Services](#), and other organizations.
- **Participate in neighborhood associations, parish ministries, school boards, etc.** People often falsely assume that federal advocacy is the only effective way to make change. Yet, local efforts can yield high impact. How can you be involved locally? Join the PTA. Attend city council meetings. Volunteer to serve on municipal committees that advise city programs, budgets, and economic initiatives to help people in poverty. Start a community garden. Help school districts serve healthy and nutritious foods. Work with local grocery stores and restaurants to donate excess, imperfect, or soon-to-expire food to food pantries. Local opportunities are countless!
- **Engage in the work of community development.** The U.S. bishops’ [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) (CCHD) funds many community organizations led by low-income people to address issues that prevent families from thriving. [See what work is happening in your community](#) to address poverty, and join these efforts.

Walking with both “feet”

Both of the Two Feet of Love in Action are necessary, and both are motivated by Christ’s love for those who are poor or vulnerable, which we strive to imitate. We do the work of charity and justice because we take seriously the call to “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord” and because we understand that “a prayer that does not lead you to practical action for your brother—the poor, the sick, those in need of help, a brother in difficulty—is a sterile and incomplete prayer” (Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 7/21/13).

As we pray and act, we can do so in a complementary way that steps with both feet. Here are some examples of where this is happening in communities like yours.

Parishes involved in [Strangers No Longer](#), a Catholic organization in Michigan that receives support from CCHD, puts two feet of love in action. A network of parishes and other faith communities, Strangers No Longer offers Circles of Support to provide assistance to newly arrived immigrants. Stepping with the *charitable works* foot, the Circles extend welcome and offer material help to newcomers. Stepping with the *social justice* foot, participants in Strangers No Longer learn—and educate others—about the reasons why migrants are forced to leave their home countries. Immigrants and non-immigrants together engage in local advocacy to seek more humane policies to assist those newly arrived in the U.S.

Another example of walking with two feet is the [parish of Ascension and St. Edmund](#), in Oak Park, IL. Recognizing the frequent inaccessibility of fresh produce for low-income families, the parish created a community garden which now donates over 2,000 pounds of produce to area food pantries each year (charitable works). The parish also educates their community, including youth, about the call to care for God's creation, and they offer opportunities to advocate for the environment and for the poor, who are disproportionately impacted by environmental issues (social justice).

Responding to the Call

St. John Paul II wrote: the Eucharist is “a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth” which spurs us to plant “a seed of living hope” to address the challenges that face our communities, “contributing the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, nos. 19-20).

As a Eucharistic people, we all share this mission to build a more human world. The USCCB's [Two Feet of Love in Action page](#) (also in [Spanish](#)) includes catechetical materials to assist Christ's disciples with this important work. The [Communities of Salt and Light webpage](#) includes resources and ideas for walking with both feet and success stories of communities putting faith into action in a variety of ways. Let us discern together and then set out to put two feet of love in action today!

Discussion questions:

- What is the connection between the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy and the call to put love into action in our communities?
- Which of the Two Feet of Love in Action (charitable works and social justice) is your stronger foot? How can you strengthen your weaker foot in order to walk in a more balanced way?
- Did any of the examples of walking with two feet inspire you? How might you imitate the example in your own faith community?