

# linking liturgy and justice

Prayer and the liturgy are at the foundation of the Catholic social mission. They inspire Catholics to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

## **PRAYER AND LITURGY**

The power of word and sacrament should not be underestimated; it is the power of God. In the memorable words of the Second Vatican Council, "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows."<sup>1</sup>

To tap the power of prayer and liturgy more fully, it is important to look at the social meanings of symbols and texts, not just at their personal meanings. Given our individualistic culture in the United States today, this is a challenge. Of course, it would be a mistake to focus exclusively on the social demands of the Gospel and the social mandates of the liturgy. The personal dimensions of both the Gospel and the liturgical mysteries are equally important. Catholics need to balance the social and the personal dimensions of our lives: We are individual persons with personal relationships and struggles. We are also social beings with communal needs and responsibilities.

Liturgical planners, music ministers, and homilists can use this resource...to deepen their awareness of Catholic social teaching and to reflect on how to integrate that teaching into prayer and liturgy. Two principles guide the parish in connecting prayer and liturgy with the social mission of the Church. First, the integrity of prayer and liturgy must be respected. Persons committed to social justice must resist the temptation to manipulate prayer and the liturgy. In particular, the parish must avoid any appearance of partisanship.

Second, the social demands of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching must be

integral to prayer and liturgy. Liturgical planners must resist the temptation to pray prayers and to celebrate liturgies that have little connection to the social dimensions of the Catholic faith and the social needs of our world.

Therefore, we need to have an active partnership between the liturgical and social justice ministries of a parish. Social justice ministers need to respect the expertise of liturgical ministers and to defer to them on the elements of good liturgy.

Liturgical ministers need to defer to the experience of social justice ministers and to craft prayers and liturgies that take into account the social mission and specific social concerns of the parish.

## **LITURGY**

The liturgy itself is social in nature. The community gathers in prayer and is sent forth to the world in mission. The Eucharist is a communal meal to which all are invited. The Eucharist forms the community into the Body of Christ. As a community, we become the One whom we receive in the Eucharist. Our spiritual hunger for God is fed, and we are sent forth to feed a hungry world. We are touched by the real presence of Christ and are sent forth to be the presence of Christ to the world. We experience the real presence of Christ at Eucharist, and our eyes are opened to see the presence of Christ in the poor and the vulnerable. The Eucharist sends us forth to be the "salt and light" of the earth and to be "leaven" in society. The Eucharist enables us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to put his teachings into practice in the world.

Following are appropriate ways to highlight the social mission of the Church within the liturgy:

The Word of God:

The starting point for good liturgical planning is the Word of God. The Lectionary is replete with Scriptures that proclaim God's justice and peace. We must look for the

social implications of God's Word in addition to the personal implications. This is a challenge in our individualistic culture. Normally the readings of the day are used. This practice ensures that over time God's people are exposed to the entire message of the Gospel

#### Music:

The selection of music needs to flow from the readings of the day, the season of the year, and the music's function in the liturgy. There are many fine pieces that incorporate the themes of Catholic social teaching since these themes find their origins in God's Word. For example, entrance hymns are meant to intensify the unity of the people gathered and can convey a unity of social purpose. Communion songs enhance the communal nature of the reception of Eucharist and can express our social mission to bring the healing presence of Jesus to the world.

#### Homily:

The homily breaks open the Word of God. When the Scriptures speak of justice, peace, community, poverty, or other aspects of the Church's social teaching, the homilist can illustrate these themes with stories related to contemporary social issues. The homilist can touch on local, state, national, and international concerns. The Preaching the Just Word program at Georgetown University's Woodstock Theological Center provides workshops and resources for how to do this well. The [Faithful Citizenship](#) statement from the U.S. Catholic bishops provides a handy summary of the range of social issues of concern to the Church. Dialogue between homilists and the parish social ministry committee can be fruitful in providing the homilist with illustrations and stories related to social issues with which the parish is engaged. The occasion of a second collection for basic human needs—for example, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development or the Catholic Relief Services Collections—can provide additional opportunities to make connections between God's Word and the social mission of God's people.

#### The Universal Prayer:

The Prayer of the Faithful is an obvious time to lift up to God the needs of his people, especially the poor and the vulnerable. It is also a time to pray for peace, justice, and human rights. Those preparing these prayers should have regular communication with the parish's social ministry committee so that these prayers can present social concerns on which the parish is working. Some samples related to the themes of Catholic social teaching are listed below.

#### Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts:

Along with the bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist, it is appropriate to

bring other gifts to fulfill the needs of the Church and the poor. Special collections at Mass for the needs of the poor connect our sacrifice for others with the sacrifice of Christ. In addition to money, gifts in kind and other substantive gifts for the poor are appropriate, but these do not include token items that will be retrieved and returned to ordinary use after the celebration. It is moving when sign and symbol speak to the themes of Catholic social teaching.

#### Commissioning Ceremonies and Blessings:

At the end of the liturgy or at another time, a special blessing can be offered, or a brief commissioning ceremony can be held, so that the parish community sends forth those who are about to take part in social ministry activities. For example, this can be done before a "Christmas in April" project, or before a parish delegation goes to a Catholic lobby day or leaves to visit a sister parish in another part of the world.

#### Concluding Rite:

The concluding rite sends the community forth to do good works. These good works include both acts of charity and works of justice. Brief announcements are permitted at this time; it is appropriate for these to include invitations to engage in social ministry projects. However, good works include not only the specific social ministry projects of the parish community as a whole, but also the social mission that all believers 'exercise as family members, workers, owners, managers, investors, consumers, and citizens. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' reflection [Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice](#) helps us make these connections.

#### Special Liturgies:

The Roman Missal includes "Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions." The prayers "For Civil Needs" and "For Various Intentions" can be used on appropriate occasions and serve as models of prayer that are infused with the basic themes of Catholic social teaching. For example, the prayers "For the Progress of Peoples," "For the Preservation of Peace and Justice," and "In Time of War or Civil Disturbance" express human solidarity. The prayers "For Those Held in Captivity" defend human rights, and those "For the Sanctification of Human Labor" express the dignity of work. The latter can be used in conjunction with our nation's celebration of Labor Day. Each year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issues a Labor Day statement that can be used in homily preparation and adult study sessions. It can be found on the [website](#) of the USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development.

Here are some examples of other ways--outside of the Mass but connected to liturgy--to reflect the social mission of the parish:

#### Displays:

Many parishes have gathering spaces or common areas just outside the worship space where displays can be set up. The social ministry committee can use this opportunity to prepare visually appealing informative displays regarding special collections or specific social ministry projects or concerns. The displays also can include information sheets that parishioners can take home. The effectiveness of displays will be enhanced if they highlight concerns and projects that the community is reflecting on through the homily, prayers, or music of the liturgy. For example, some parishes prepare informational displays on global development issues in conjunction with the promotion of CRS Rice Bowl during Lent.

#### Sign-Up-Opportunities:

In conjunction with ongoing displays, or simply set up at tables, the social ministry committee can make sign-up sheets available before or after Mass to recruit volunteers for service or justice projects. Every parish should have opportunities both for acts of charity and for works of justice as responses to the social mission that all share.

#### Offerings of Letters:

Some parishes hold "offerings of letters" to public officials on key issues related to the themes of Catholic social teaching. Sometimes parishioners are given sample letters to take home as models for their own letters to public officials. At other times, tables are set up with sample letters, stationery, and postage so that parishioners can compose their letters in an appropriate space after Mass. Sometimes an informational session is held after Mass, or persons involved in social ministry are available to answer questions. This strategy is particularly effective when used on Sundays when the readings of the day provide opportunities for the homilist to use current issues as illustrations of Catholic social teaching in action. Each year, the nonprofit organization Bread for the World provides materials that help parishes make annual offerings of letters on an issue related to hunger. In addition to using such materials, the parish social ministry committee should contact the diocesan social action office or state Catholic conference for guidance on offerings of letters.

Adult Study Sessions:

In some parish settings, adults are able to gather after Mass for adult study. This time provides an excellent opportunity to engage parishioners with Catholic social teaching.

## **SAMPLE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

Appendix V of the Roman Missal provides "Examples of Formularies for the Universal Prayer." Many of these examples incorporate themes of Catholic social teaching. The parish also will want to craft Prayers of Faithful that pray for specific needs related to issues and projects being undertaken by its social ministry. Communication between the liturgical and social ministries of the parish is critical in this regard. Below are some additional Prayers of the Faithful that incorporate themes of Catholic social teaching:

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

For all the peoples of the world, that the Lord will protect the sacred life and dignity of every human person, we pray to the Lord.

For the life and dignity of all God's people, that we may protect life and promote dignity in law and policy, we pray to the Lord.

Call to Family, Community and Participation

For our families and our community, that the Lord will strengthen family life and the common good of all, we pray to the Lord.

For our community and nation, that we will learn to embrace the gifts and needs of all, especially the poor and the powerless, we pray to the Lord.

For all citizens, that we will help build a world of justice and peace through our participation in public life, we pray to the Lord.

Rights and Responsibilities

For those who are oppressed, that the Lord will set them free and defend their rights, we pray to the Lord.

For those who suffer injustice, that the Lord will inspire us to champion their rights and to set them free, we pray to the Lord.

#### Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

For the poor and the vulnerable, that the Lord will lift them up and answer their need through us, we pray to the Lord.

For the voiceless and the powerless, that the Lord will help them find their voices and their power, we pray to the Lord.

#### Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

For all those who labor, that they will have a voice in their work, enjoy the just fruits of their work, and find sustenance for their lives and families, we pray to the Lord.

For all children, especially those in the bondage of child labor, that the Lord will set them free, we pray to the Lord.

#### Solidarity

For all the nations of the world, that the Lord will help them find the peace and prosperity that flow from authentic solidarity, we pray to the Lord.

For all the peoples of the world, especially those oppressed by poverty, that our nation may walk with them in the journey toward freedom, we pray to the Lord.

#### Care for God's Creation

For the beauty of God's creation, that the Lord will gift us with the wisdom to preserve and protect it, we pray to the Lord.

For the earth and all its creatures, that we will treat our planet with the care of a good steward, we pray to the Lord.

### **THE THEMES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND THE LECTIONARY**

As noted above, the Lectionary includes numerous Scriptures that communicate the themes of Catholic social teaching. A key to making this connection is to look for the implications of the Scriptures for social practices, policies, laws, and institutions. A skilled homilist is able to infuse his preaching regularly with the social demands of the Gospel. Although the following examples do not constitute a comprehensive index and the same texts also communicate other themes and messages, they illustrate potential links between the themes of Catholic social teaching and the readings of the Lectionary.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Lectionary Reference (Cycle)</b>
Life and Dignity of the Human Person	Easter Vigil [42] (Year A, Year B, Year C)  Fifth Sunday of Lent [34] (A)  Fifth Sunday of the Year [74] (A)
Call to Family, Community and Participation	Sunday in the Octave of Christmas-Holy Family [17]  Second Sunday of Easter [44,45] (A, B)  Twenty-Seventh Sunday of the Year [141] (B)  Thirty-First Sunday of the Year [153] (B)

<p>Rights and Responsibilities</p>	<p>Third Sunday of the Year [70] (C)</p> <p>Fourth Sunday of the Year [72] (B)</p> <p>Holy Innocents [698] (C) (rights of children to life)</p>
<p>Option for the Poor and Vulnerable</p>	<p>Third Sunday of Advent [7] (A)</p> <p>Sixth Sunday of the Year [79] (C)</p> <p>Fifteenth Sunday of the Year [106] (C)</p> <p>Twenty-Sixth Sunday of the Year [139] (C)</p> <p>Twenty-Eighth Sunday of the Year [144] (B)</p>
<p>Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers</p>	<p>Ninth Sunday of the Year [87] (B)</p> <p>Twenty-Fifth Sunday of the Year [134] (A)</p> <p>Joseph the Worker [559]</p>
<p>Solidarity</p>	<p>First Sunday of Advent [1] (A)</p> <p>Pentecost [63, 64] (A, B, C)</p> <p>Seventh Sunday of the Year [80, 82] (A, C)</p>

	<p>Twentieth Sunday of the Year [119] (A)</p> <p>Twenty-First Sunday of the Year [153] (B)</p> <p>Christ the King [161] (A)</p>
Care for God's Creation	<p>Eleventh Sunday of the Year [93] (B)</p> <p>Fifteenth Sunday of the Year [104] (A)</p> <p>Francis of Assisi [651]</p>

1. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Lumen Gentium), 1963, no. 10. In *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, SJ (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1966).

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