

World Day of the Poor and Catholic Social Teaching

World Day of the Poor is an expression of Catholic Social Teaching ('CST'). But what is Catholic Social Teaching?

No need to feel bad if you don't know what it is. CST is often referred to as the best kept secret in the Church even though it is at the heart of the Catholic tradition. Clue is in the word 'secret'.

Here is a very short digest of CST¹ - it will only take 5-10 minutes² to read.

What is Catholic Social Teaching?

In a nutshell, CST is a set of key moral principles which draws upon Scripture and the Church's long reflection on human experience. Theologians still debate whether there are only 4 top principles, or whether there are in fact 30 of them that are crucial to the Church's tradition and mission. We will go for somewhere in the middle but much closer to 4 than to 30: the **7 key principles** of CST.

One: Dignity of the Human Person

This principle calls to recognise that all human beings are our brothers and sisters designed to be one race - the human race, and one family - the human family. It reminds us that all means all, including those living in poverty and on the margins of society.

Two: Family and Community

This principle emphasises that people are social beings made for community and communion with one another, living and sharing our daily lives, hopes

¹ These are adapted excerpts from *Caritas in Practice*, authored by EducareM with CSAN in 2018.

² Of course, you could spend hours and also years if you wanted to find out more about CST. You could start here: <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/>



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and dreams. It thus challenges us to critically view how well society organises itself for family and community by putting the dignity and value of the unique individual person at its heart.

Three: Solidarity and the Common Good

Solidarity is based on the belief that we are all responsible for one another because we all belong to the one human family and must unite together against dividing forces. Common Good is what we must aim for - through each person working for what builds up the whole and not just their own immediate needs or family.

Four: Rights and Responsibilities

This principle reminds us that every human being regardless of background or circumstances has equal rights as a person. The human rights that the Catholic Church speaks of go much further than the International Human Rights Convention. With these rights to a life where basic needs are met come responsibilities to respect the rights of each person. We are challenged to share what we do not need when there are people who lack the necessities to live a dignified life. In order to ensure the common good, we must do both: protect our human rights and meet our responsibility for the rights of others.

Five: Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Poverty is defined by CST as being prevented from living a life worthy of the dignity of a human being because of one's inability to provide for basic needs. Extreme inequality causes many people to suffer varying conditions of poverty with wider negative impact on the whole of society. For this reason, CST puts the poor, the marginalised and the vulnerable in society as a top priority.

Six: Dignity of Work

The Church is clear in its teaching on the dignity of work and the full humanity of the worker. Workers are not commodities to be hired and fired at will. The



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rights of the worker are clearly spelt out but with these rights also come responsibilities of the employer. Both parties must act honestly and justly by exchanging an honest day's work for a fair wage and in doing so together contribute to the common good.

Seven: Stewardship

The term stewardship means that we know that all life on earth is sacred and holy and we are responsible and accountable for it. Respect for the dignity of life extends not just to every human being on earth but to the universe in its entirety. Caring for this earth and creation is part of what it is to be a Christian.

CST and World Day of the Poor

Two principles may be regarded as especially highlighted for the World Day of the Poor, started by Pope Francis in 2017: Option for the poor and vulnerable and Solidarity. They can be re-described as below:

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: In accordance with the Gospel of Jesus, we choose to accompany those who are poor, marginalised or oppressed. We are committed to combating the dehumanising poverty that robs people of their dignity and humanity. We are guided by Social Teaching to work for freedom of the oppressed and an equitable sharing of the gifts of the earth and to help the marginalized be the arbiters of their own development. We take up the cause of people who are poor as our own, putting ourselves alongside them. To this degree we will take a stand alongside them in their need and confront the injustice they face.

Solidarity: we work in solidarity with people who are poor and marginalised, thereby achieving the fruits of peace, justice and human development. Solidarity binds us together in the common vision of establishing a world where all human beings receive what rightly belongs to them as sons and daughters of God.

Now you can see how Catholic Social Teaching is at the very foundation of World Day of the Poor and by taking part you are living and doing CST.