

Supplemental Information for
Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism
Life In Christ – Walking With God
To group leaders of
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs
March, 2011

Session 11: “On Earthly Goods, Love for the Poor, and Work”

Suggested Environment

Since this session will deal with our obligation to be concerned for the poor, and since this is the Lenten season, might I suggest that you put a basket for “contributions” and mention during the session the idea of making a group contribution this coming weekend to the poor boxes we have in Church—just a thought.

As a session leader I would recommend your reading and perhaps encouraging your members who have the red *USCCA* to read the section entitled “Reflections of the Catholic Bishops of the United States on the Church’s Social Teaching: Major Themes” (pages 421-424). Key doctrinal statements on the seventh commandment are also succinctly found on the following pages: Commandment Seven (*USCCA* pp. 426-427). I might point out that we have talked about these major themes previously during session five of this past year’s fall series (pages 26-31 of this current book). I’m going to be including some of the same links from that previous session in case you want to review some of the past material.

Lifting Our Hearts

Here is a statement of the Bishops of the US that I would encourage you to read before you say the prayer together on page 68. You might introduce this with words to the effect, “We need to remember that all aspects of our life together, including the economic, have to feel the effect of our fundamental choice to be a disciples and follower of Christ.” The statement is:

All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the common good.

*A Catholic Framework for Economic Life
United States Catholic Conference, 1996*

I have a link to the page that serves as the entry point to the Bishops’ conference section on economic and social justice later in this session commentary. We don’t need much of a reminder other than these two years of economic struggle to see the impact that immoral and unjust decisions have had on our life together and the common good.

Sharing Our Good News

As usual an opportunity to see what group members did or thought about doing following last week's session.

Exploring the Catechism

We are focusing on commandment seven: "Thou shall not steal." I'm going to repeat upfront here a comment I made several sessions ago. It follows on an observation or perhaps a question that can arise when one looks at the four words in the seventh commandment and sees the broad scope that the Church points out (EG: economic relations among nations) over a variety of related topics and areas, seemingly much beyond the simple direction of the commandment: [From Session 8]

"One final comment I think is necessary. Someone may wonder, how does the Church feel it can say so much about this area of family when what God has said in this commandment is "Honor your father and mother?" I would suggest that you take a careful look at the very first paragraph I quoted above from JP II's apostolic exhortation. Notice the authority that the "Church" is claiming in the very first line..."Illuminated by faith...compelled....good news...to all the world." Here is a good example of the Church using the authority given to it by Christ and the scope of its Tradition (with the Capital 'T'), speaking out in an apostolic way to broaden the message of the "Good News" that was handed over to the original apostles who were commissioned to teach and baptize all nations. Much of what we will read as Church teaching on relationships that directly bear on these last seven commandments stem from this important role Christ has given his Church to interpret and proclaim the good news necessary for our salvation. "

In a similar fashion, the Church has had nearly 2000 years of lived experience with "earthly goods" and all the ramifications associated with our living together. Therefore, looking at the nature of man and the human person as seen through the person of Christ, the Church with inspiration of the Holy Spirit feels compelled to speak out on the conditions and issues we face living in community. Admittedly, there is tension in the first paragraph between the idea of goods as having a universal destination [meaning the goods of the earth like minerals are owned by all] and the idea of private property. There always will be such a tension. Think of the national parks that the US created. Early on in our nation's history our presidents declared that a place like Yellowstone was too unique and such a treasure that it had to be held in trust for all of the citizens of the US.

But that doesn't mean we can always define the term "common good," does it? At least we cannot define it easily. Recall the intense and ongoing debate over national health care policy that is still not settled, and even issues as contemporary as the effort in Wisconsin to limit collective bargaining for public employees have a relevancy to this week's discussion. It may interest you to know that the Bishops of Wisconsin have written a collective letter condemning that state's governor for the direction he is seeking to go with the state's new budget.

I certainly would encourage fostering discussion on a sentence in the second paragraph that reads: "One of the key concepts in the teachings of the Church is that the goods of creation are not given for the few but are destined for everyone and for all of creation." This is a bit of an amplification of what is said in the first paragraph of this section. This is really an immense topic that is very relevant today as we debate national policy. Here's a link to a great compendium of social teachings: [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#). I have put some selected sections from this document at the end of this commentary because they are the key areas that deal with private property and the common good. If you are a student of American history, you can recall for the group the struggle in the early 20th century over the trust "busting" efforts that broke up the oil monopoly of the Rockefellers' and current efforts by the justice department to review various monopolies because of their impact on the common good. It may surprise you to know that the Sherman Antitrust Act was put into law back in 1890 when the US Congress realized that business [primarily railroads then] didn't always have the "common good" in mind as they sought to increase their profits. At times this feels like all economics and politics but it plays a huge role in how we see our fundamental outreach to help those most disadvantaged in our society.

Note that the third paragraph and the Catechism have some very direct words to say about "business fraud" and "forcing up prices" [read speculation like speculators have been forcing the price of oil up rapidly]. I guess the Wall Street bankers that brought on the economic down turn haven't been keen on social justice or honesty for that matter. Again, be sensitive to the accusation that the Church pushes socialism in its economic policy. In reality, the Church has always walked a very deliberate line between the rights of the human person and the need for an awareness of the collective rights of human persons when we live together under the auspices of fostering the common good.

You'll note that this section ends on a note expanding the understanding of this respect and justice towards creation to include living and non-living creation together as part of the common good. Pope Benedict has written and spoken a number of times on issues that relate to the environment under the auspices of the Church's understanding of this responsibility towards creation.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

Luke 19: 1-10

- 1 ¹ He came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town.
- 2 Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man,
- 3 was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature.
- 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way.
- 5 When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house."
- 6 And he came down quickly and received him with joy.

7 When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner."

8 But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over."

9 ² And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.

10 ³ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

Footnotes

¹ [1-10] The story of the tax collector Zacchaeus is unique to this gospel. While a rich man ([Luke 19:2](#)), Zacchaeus provides a contrast to the rich man of [Luke 18:18-23](#) who cannot detach himself from his material possessions to become a follower of Jesus. Zacchaeus, according to Luke, exemplifies the proper attitude toward wealth: he promises to give half of his possessions to the poor ([Luke 19:8](#)) and consequently is the recipient of salvation ([Luke 19:9-10](#)).

² [9] A descendant of Abraham: literally, "a son of Abraham." The tax collector Zacchaeus, whose repentance is attested by his determination to amend his former ways, shows himself to be a true descendant of Abraham, the true heir to the promises of God in the Old Testament. Underlying Luke's depiction of Zacchaeus as a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Jews ([Luke 1:73](#); [16:22-31](#)), is his recognition of the central place occupied by Israel in the plan of salvation.

³ [10] This verse sums up for Luke his depiction of the role of Jesus as savior in this gospel.

I have included the footnotes from the USCCB site for this section of Luke because they have some great commentary on the scripture reading. You may want to share the commentary with your group.

Sharing Question

I would encourage sharing/discussion on the latter part of this Question, the part that begins "In what ways have I been a good steward of what God has given me?" I think the focus all too often seems to be on the "I'm not going to take someone else's property unjustly" when each of us individually has an obligation in justice to use our time, talent, treasure for the "common good" too. Remember we have been saying the I Confess....etc., at Mass during Lent and it clearly has a part in it that says "...and what I have failed to do..." Rather than a focus on restorative justice if I have wronged another, I think it is a good idea to see the possibility of my harming the common good by withholding my contributions to society.

Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)

There are several really important ideas in this section. I'd encourage underlining the words at the bottom of page 70 that read, "...when we unite our work to Christ, we are participating in God's creative activity." There is an aspect of our being made in "His Image" that comes out when one thinks about the implications of those words. The paragraph on the top of page 71 similarly has important thoughts for the meaning of discipleship. The last sentence at the end of that first paragraph, "Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ (2427-2428)," is somewhat an extension of the previous sentence I mentioned. We don't always think of ourselves as "animating reality with the spirit of Christ" but in truth when we build a Habitat House, serve as a Care Giver, deliver Meals on Wheels, or any other activity for the good of another; we do really bring Christ's love to those around us. And that is being a follower of Christ and certainly is our means of sanctification.

The second and third paragraphs in this section also have important elements of the Church's social teaching and you might just ask the question: "What implications are there for what is going on in Wisconsin in the Church's teachings?"

Sharing Our Faith

Following up from what I said above, I would think the second bullet point would be worthwhile to discuss. I think it is really important for a healthy vision of seeing work as a means of our sanctification but also of seeing what we do when we "retire" from work as another opportunity to "work" on our sanctification by giving back to others and society what we have received. A healthy retirement cries out for opportunities to be of service to others.

Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)

This section is well done and needs little additional commentary. I would encourage underlining the first sentence in the second paragraph on page 72, "There is no concept so key to Christianity as that of the value of the human person." Notice how that thought broadens outward from the one to the many ending up with a sense of obligation between nations. Additionally, in the third paragraph the sentence "The Church has always taught a preferential option for the poor" and CCC 2444 should be noted. The Epistle of James quoted on the bottom of page 72 likewise has a beautiful and direct message of our obligation in charity to one another. You might even direct your group to Matthew, Chapter 25, and the chapter that is sometimes known as the last judgment proclamation. It is the famous scene of the final judgment when the Lord is "separating the sheep from the goats" and the just ask, "When did we see you hungry, clothe you," and so on and the Lord replies, "I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me."

Sharing Our Faith

Any or all of these are good questions to ponder but I suspect that you will not have a lack of commentary or discussion on issues presented that challenge us to be true disciples.

Living the Good News

There's quite a range of suggestions here and I would encourage you to be sensitive to the "challenge of the week overload." By that I mean a comment one of our group leaders made to me recently that made sense. "Wouldn't it be better to have a sustained effort on one major area of change or direction than jumping from one thing to the next each week?" I pass that along because several groups have focused in on one direction [example: those who have been responsible for the "Greeter Program" before Mass] and found that more satisfying. I mentioned a link to the Bishops site on social justice so here it is: [USCCB Social Justice Areas](#).

Lifting our Hearts

I think this type of a session is an even greater opportunity than usual to go around the circle and offer prayers and intentions for what is in our hearts. I suspect at times we can feel overcome by the enormity of the challenges to living a faithful Christian life in the face of our culture. Let's not be discouraged and forget the power of prayer and our need to trust that God's graces will be there as we need them and as those we pray for will need them.

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to allaabs1770@gmail.com

Here is additional material from the Vatican's website on social doctrine. The major focus of the sections I selected center on the issue of common good.

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Origin and meaning

171. *Among the numerous implications of the common good, immediate significance is taken on by the principle of the universal destination of goods: "God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity"[360]. This principle is based on the fact that "the*

original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (*Gen 1:28-29*). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone.

This is *the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods*. The earth, by reason of its fruitfulness and its capacity to satisfy human needs, is God's first gift for the sustenance of human life"[361]. The human person cannot do without the material goods that correspond to his primary needs and constitute the basic conditions for his existence; these goods are absolutely indispensable if he is to feed himself, grow, communicate, associate with others, and attain the highest purposes to which he is called[362].

172. *The universal right to use the goods of the earth is based on the principle of the universal destination of goods*. Each person must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development. The right to the common use of goods is the "first principle of the whole ethical and social order" [363] and "the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine"[364]. For this reason the Church feels bound in duty to specify the nature and characteristics of this principle. It is first of all a *natural* right, inscribed in human nature and not merely a positive right connected with changing historical circumstances; moreover it is an "inherent" [365] right. It is innate in individual persons, in every person, and has *priority* with regard to any human intervention concerning goods, to any legal system concerning the same, to any economic or social system or method: "All other rights, whatever they are, including property rights and the right of free trade must be subordinated to this norm [the universal destination of goods]; they must not hinder it, but must rather expedite its application. It must be considered a serious and urgent social obligation to refer these rights to their original purpose"[366].

173. *Putting the principal of the universal destination of goods into concrete practice, according to the different cultural and social contexts, means that methods, limits and objects must be precisely defined*. Universal destination and utilization of goods do not mean that everything is at the disposal of each person or of all people, or that the same object may be useful or belong to each person or all people. If it is true that everyone is born with the right to use the goods of the earth, it is likewise true that, in order to ensure that this right is exercised in an equitable and orderly fashion, regulated interventions are necessary, interventions that are the result of national and international agreements, and a juridical order that adjudicates and specifies the exercise of this right.

174. *The principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods, so as to bring about a world of fairness and solidarity*, in which the creation of wealth can take on a positive function. Wealth, in effect, presents this possibility in the many different forms in which it can find expression as the result of a process of production that works with the available technological and economic resources, both natural and derived. This result is guided by resourcefulness, planning and labour, and used as a means for promoting the well-being of all men and all peoples and for preventing their exclusion and exploitation.

175. *The universal destination of goods requires a common effort to obtain for every person and for all peoples the conditions necessary for integral development, so that everyone can contribute to making a more humane world, “in which each individual can give and receive, and in which the progress of some will no longer be an obstacle to the development of others, nor a pretext for their enslavement”[367]. This principle corresponds to the call made unceasingly by the Gospel to people and societies of all times, tempted as they always are by the desire to possess, temptations which the Lord Jesus chose to undergo (cf. Mk 1:12-13; Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13) in order to teach us how to overcome them with his grace.*

b. The universal destination of goods and private property

176. *By means of work and making use of the gift of intelligence, people are able to exercise dominion over the earth and make it a fitting home: “In this way, he makes part of the earth his own, precisely the part which he has acquired through work; *this is the origin of individual property*”[368]. Private property and other forms of private ownership of goods “assure a person a highly necessary sphere for the exercise of his personal and family autonomy and ought to be considered as an extension of human freedom ... stimulating exercise of responsibility, it constitutes one of the conditions for civil liberty”[369]. Private property is an essential element of an authentically social and democratic economic policy, and it is the guarantee of a correct social order. *The Church's social doctrine requires that ownership of goods be equally accessible to all*[370], so that all may become, at least in some measure, owners, and it excludes recourse to forms of “common and promiscuous dominion”[371].*

177. *Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute and untouchable: “On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation: the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone”[372]. The principle of the universal destination of goods is an affirmation both of God's full and perennial lordship over every reality and of the requirement that the goods of creation remain ever destined to the development of the whole person and of all humanity[373]. This principle is not opposed to the right to private property[374] but indicates the need to regulate it. *Private property, in fact, regardless of the concrete forms of the regulations and juridical norms relative to it, is in its essence only an instrument for respecting the principle of the universal destination of goods; in the final analysis, therefore, it is not an end but a means*[375].*