



Lord, when did we see you hungry

MATTHEW 25:37

Catechetical Sunday 2024 Theme: “Lord, when did we see you hungry” (Mt 25:37)

Article Title: The Eucharist and Missionary Discipleship: Living Out Matthew 25

Abstract: The Eucharist compels each one of us to live out Matthew 25, feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and clothing the naked (Mt 25:35-36). If we wish to honor the Body of Christ, then we cannot ignore the social issues that impact “the least of these” in our communities. The Eucharist reminds us that we are part of a community and the human family as members of the Body of Christ. Therefore, we ought to encounter Christ in the Eucharist in personal and social ways while raising awareness of how to live as missionary disciples who go forth from the Eucharist meal as the Body of Christ, broken for the world.

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Audience: Parish Catechists | Youth Ministers | Parents

Pillar: Eucharistic Life

The Eucharist and Missionary Discipleship: Living Out Matthew 25

In their 1997 statement on [Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes](#), the U.S. bishops highlighted several challenges facing our world today such as global hunger, mass migration of refugees, conflicts, foreign debt, and environmental devastation. They also highlighted our Catholic call to global solidarity especially with “the least of these” in two distinct but related ways: 1) The individual responsibility of every Catholic rooted in our baptism and expressed in our everyday choices and actions; 2) The essential role of the parish as the spiritual home and religious resource for the Christian faithful, both sacramental and educational, and as a place for common prayer and action in pursuit of global solidarity. The Catholic Social Teaching principle on [Life and Dignity of the Human Person](#) requires that we measure every policy, every institution, and every action by whether it protects human life and enhances human dignity, especially for the poor and vulnerable.



In the United States, 38.3 million people live in conditions of food insecurity. According to a [2022 report](#) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 11.7 million are children. These households with food insecurity were unable to provide adequate nutritious food for their children, and children reported skipping meals because there was not enough money for food. [This article](#) from PovertyUSA.org offers a very helpful overview of food insecurity and its causes as well as possible solutions to ending food insecurity in the United States.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing inflation crisis have significantly increased the number of households experiencing food insecurity. Even though the U.S. government put tools in place during the pandemic to help ease worsening food insecurity, those additional benefits have now stopped and the U.S. Congress has mandated that there be stricter work requirements attached to receiving benefits from the Supplement Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP). Additionally, the proposed Farm Bill in the House of Representatives aims to cut future SNAP benefits by up to \$30 billion over ten years. For more information on the Farm Bill and to take action, visit the [USCCB Action Center](#).

These realities lead us to ask why people are hungry, food insecure, and unable to provide for their families and what type of answer is needed to address these realities in our parish communities, neighborhoods, cities, and society. To shed some light on these moral challenges, I invite readers to reflect on three passages from Sacred Scripture that follow the See-Judge-Act methodology. This methodology, which can be traced back to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and to St. Thomas Aquinas' analysis of the virtue of prudence, was formally presented in St. Pope John XXIII's 1961 encyclical [Mater et Magistra](#) (On Christianity and Social Progress). The methodology allows us to interpret the "signs of the times" (Vatican II, [Gaudium et Spes](#), no. 4), illuminate with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging ([Caritas in Veritate](#), no. 12), and put our faith into action each day we are confronted by a brother and sister in need ([Fratelli Tutti](#), no. 69).

SEE: "Give them some food yourselves" (Matthew 14:16)

Jesus shared many lessons with his disciples about God's vision of justice and peace. In his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, Jesus instructs his disciples to go beyond personal boundaries, customs and cultures, and societal status. In particular, he shows them a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, for Jesus identifies himself with "the least of these" (Mt 25:34-40; Lk 4:16-21; Lk 6:20-23). Jesus constantly tests his disciples to be attentive to both the spiritual and human needs of God's children. According to the Gospel narrative of Matthew (14:13-21):

Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way."

The Gospel narrative of the Five Loaves and Two Fish highlights Jesus's compassion for the immediate needs of the crowd. The people are tired and hungry and Jesus sees that and decides to act upon it by asking the disciples to feed them. One important lesson here is that Jesus is not only focused on proclaiming the Kingdom of God, but he is also attentive to the human and

social needs of God's children. Jesus's commitment to "the least of these" has its roots in the Hebrew prophets who announced God's special love for the poor and called his people to a covenant of love and justice. This commitment arises from our experiences of Christ in the Eucharist. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, "To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren" (no. 1397).

The Good News we have received should overflow into our lives and move us to mission in the world. Thus, the Concluding Rites in the Eucharist are not an end but a beginning, calling us to make our entire lives "Eucharistic," so that "the Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation" (St. John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 27). Additionally, St. John Paul II issues the following challenge in *Dies Domini*, no. 72:

Why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick, providing food for needy families, spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity: these would certainly be ways of bringing into people's lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table.

JUDGE: An Ethic of Christian Discipleship (Matthew 25:31-46)

The Gospel narrative of Matthew (25:31-46) of the Judgment of the Nations sheds some light on judging the needs and realities of our parish communities according to our faith values and principles. "For I was hungry and you gave me food... Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you'" (Matthew 25:35, 37). This Gospel narrative offers an important framework for God's vision of communion and solidarity since it puts us in touch with circumstances that will determine how we will be judged at the end of time. Pope Benedict XVI states in *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 15:

The great parable of the Last Judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46), in which love becomes the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof. Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.

This Gospel narrative reminds us that the poor have been an integral dimension of Christian discipleship from the beginning of the church. Given that we are made for communion, our actions of solidarity among one another are also reflected in the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the Communion of Saints. However, like all other virtues, solidarity (which is the quality of moral character) requires formative training. Hence, ecclesial and lay leaders must provide parishioners with experiences of solidarity.

The Catholic identity envisions a just society in which we all live in right relationship with God and with one another. This relationship depicts the experience of communities practicing

forgiveness, mutual respect, and love, and demands the inclusion and active welcoming of the poor and vulnerable. Seeing the poor and vulnerable through the lens of doctrines like the Holy Trinity and the Communion of Saints secures a different vantage than viewing them through a vision of the social contract. Through the sacramental practices of reconciliation and communion, the Church can further facilitate communal examinations and personal encounters between the marginalized and the privileged in our society. The Church can also help the laity convert against unjust habits and practices that degrade the life and dignity of the human person by creating initiatives that can move them towards an ethic of Christian solidarity. Fidelity to God's Kingdom requires social transformation to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate "the least of these" such as the poor, homeless, migrants, and refugees. It is this incarnational solidarity that Jesus of Nazareth invites us to immerse our bodies and precious resources as a prerequisite of true discipleship (Lk 10:29-37; Lk 22:14-20).

ACT: Go and Bear Fruit (John 15:16)

In their 1993 statement on [Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish](#), the U.S. bishops stated that "Parishes are called to reach out to the hurting, the poor, and the vulnerable in our midst in concrete acts of charity. Just as the gospel tells us our lives will be judged by our response to the least of these, so too our parishes should be measured by our help for the hungry, the homeless, the troubled, and the alienated in our own community and beyond... A Church that teaches an option for the poor must reflect that option in our service to those in need." The bishops note that partnerships with Catholic Charities and other churches, and establishing food pantries, shelters, and outreach programs are integral aspects of parish life.

At my parish in northern Arlington, Virginia, [Our Lady Queen of Peace](#), during the closing announcements we hear about the many different opportunities that we can engage throughout the week to live "Eucharistic lives." Some of these are local opportunities such as donating items to the [Food Pantry](#) and the [Matthew 25 Ministry](#) to feed and clothe hundreds of families in need. We also engage in global opportunities such as the [Haiti Ministry](#) and the [CRS Rice Bowl Campaign](#) to support community-based social outreach and development programs of our twin parish St. Joseph of Medor, Haiti, and other global communities in need.

During my time living and working in the Bronx, New York, I witnessed first-hand the amazing labor that went into feeding many families in need. [St. Jerome H.A.N.D.S. Community Center](#) Food Pantry Program which serves over 1,000 families and individuals in the South Bronx, New York, is feeding one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country, the Mott Haven community. Similarly, in the Rio Grande Valley, Sr. Normal Pimentel's efforts have been widely recognized for her agency's commitment to feeding the hungry and welcoming the stranger. Furthermore, through the [Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley](#), restaurants and members of the community are bearing much fruit by donating food items and meals to feed "the least of these."

Christian solidarity towards "the least of these" is manifested through pastoral care and social services like the ones provided by Our Lady Queen of Peace in Arlington, Virginia, St. Jerome H.A.N.D.S. Community Center in the South Bronx, New York, and Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in McAllen, Texas. These communal solidarity efforts are responding to the needy in their midst who comprise an integral part of their communities. The ecclesial and lay leaders

in these places are truly living Jesus's message of neighborly love. In effect, they know that whenever they give a hand to "the least of these," they are also giving a hand to Jesus. For Scripture clearly states, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me" (Mt 25:34-40). These are the *Good Samaritans* whom Jesus praises in the *Gospel of Luke (10:29-37)*. More importantly, they are the ones proclaiming the *Good News*, a message of love, welcome, and salvation for all people.

The Table is Prepared for the Lord's Supper

Contemplating Christ's sacrifice for the world in need, we are compelled to follow his example. Drawn "into the very dynamic of his self-giving" we are moved to self-giving action in solidarity with the members of our human family who face injustice (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 13). St. John Chrysostom's words in the fourth century become real for us as we reflect on Matthew 25: "Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked" ([Sacraments and Social Mission, Eucharist and Social Mission](#), pgs. 7-8). And we can add, do not ignore him when he is hungry, homeless, in prison, and/or as a new arrival in our communities and cities.

The Eucharist compels each one of us to live out Matthew 25, feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and clothing the naked (Mt 25:35-36). If we wish to honor the Body of Christ, then we cannot ignore the social issues that impact "the least of these" in our communities. The Eucharist reminds us that we are part of a community and the human family as members of the Body of Christ. Therefore, we ought to encounter Christ in the Eucharist in personal and social ways while raising awareness of how to live as missionary disciples who go forth from the Eucharist meal as the Body of Christ, broken for the world.

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Mt 25:34)

Questions for Additional Reflection

- Does your parish or ministry participate in any initiatives that help combat poverty and hunger?
- What does our faith have to say about these issues and their causes?
- What kind of challenges does the Gospel present to us as we are called to be a voice for others in a state of vulnerability?
- How does the Eucharistic meal compel you to care for those who are hungry and/or food insecure?

For more information on the Eucharist and social mission catechetical, prayer, and liturgical resources, please visit: <https://www.usccb.org/eucharist-social-mission>.

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Bio:

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