

preaching the social doctrine of the church

The following are excerpts from a three volume (years A, B and C) collection of homily helps from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace called Preaching the Social Doctrine of the Church in the Mass.

Using the Social Doctrine of the Church as a framework upon which the entire Liturgical cycle of readings can be placed enables the homilist to see Sacred Scripture as a whole and better understand the connection between the Gospels and the other Scriptural texts. At the same time, the readings from the Scriptures help to reveal the depth of the Social Doctrine of the Church and how teaching that Doctrine empowers the Church to truly be an "expert" in.

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In his Encyclical Letter, *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II referred to the Social Doctrine of the Church as a "valid instrument of evangelization" (54). In another part of the Encyclical, he also wrote that: "In effect, to teach and spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ and the Savior" (5).

The strong connection between Sacred Scripture and the Social Doctrine of the Church becomes evident when these elements are joined in the context of

evangelization. Texts based upon the Sunday readings and the social teaching of the Church will help guide the homilist to reflect upon this relationship and to assist the people of God in living their call to be Christian in name and in fact. This connection is one of the ways in which the Church is energized in order to carry out her role as teacher and through which she faces the various hopes and challenges of today's world.

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The long tradition of the social concern and social teaching of the Church is seen as something transformative and responsive to the needs of each day. In preaching the Word of God along with her Social Doctrine, the Church shows that she is truly committed to the care and concern of each member of the human family.

SAMPLE HOMILY HELP

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year "B"

Numbers 11:25-29

James 5:1-6

Mark 9:38-43, 47-48

There are two very different messages in the readings today. The first is discipleship and sharing in the mission of communicating God's love. The second is found in the Letter of St. James as he warns the wealthy of the church against placing their wealth and power before their love of God. However, those two messages are not exclusive

of one another and we can see how they are intertwined, especially in the Second Reading and the Gospel passage from St. Mark.

In the Gospel, we heard Jesus tell his disciples what they need to do. .. how far they need to go to be his follower. We cannot, however only listen to the end of today's passage ... if your hand, foot or eye causes you to sin. Instead we need to be reminded of something that we heard in the Gospel last week, when the disciples argued among themselves regarding who was the most important. We continue with that same message when Jesus warns against arrogance and the lack of recognizing the presence of God in others.

St. James addressed what he saw as a similar and growing problem within the Church. Apparently, this centered around a lack of concern for some members of the community by others. It also appears that the problem was based upon wealth and the feeling of superiority among some.

"The Church's love for the poor is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, by the poverty of Jesus and by his attention to the poor. This love concerns material poverty and also the numerous forms of cultural and religious poverty."¹ The Church, "since her origin and in spite of the failing of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere."² Prompted by the Gospel injunction: "You have received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:8), the Church teaches that one should assist one's fellow man in his various needs and fills the human community with countless works of corporal and spiritual mercy. "Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God,"³ even if the practice of charity is not limited-to alms-giving but implies addressing the social and political dimensions of the problem of poverty. In her teaching the Church constantly returns to this relationship between charity and justice: "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give

them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."⁴ The Council Fathers strongly recommended that this duty be fulfilled correctly, remembering that "what is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity." ⁵ Love for the poor is certainly" incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use"⁶ (cf. Jas 5:1-6)."

We have all received the Spirit of God - there are no "non-members." Because of this, we go about our lives as true brothers and sisters. Our faith does not allow us to have the attitude that we are somehow exclusive. In using the gifts that we have been given we know that we can not allow anything in this world to overshadow our relationship with God.

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2444.

2 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2448.

3 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2447.

4 Saint Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastora/is*, 3, 21: PL 77, 87: "Nam cum qualibet necessaria indigentibus ministramus, sua illis reddimus, non nostra largimur; iustitiae potius debitum soluimus, quam misericordiae opera implemus."

5 SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8: AAS 58 (1966), 845; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2446.

6 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2445.

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