

# Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

## “Option for the Poor and Vulnerable”

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment ([Mt 25:31-46](#)) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.



### Scripture

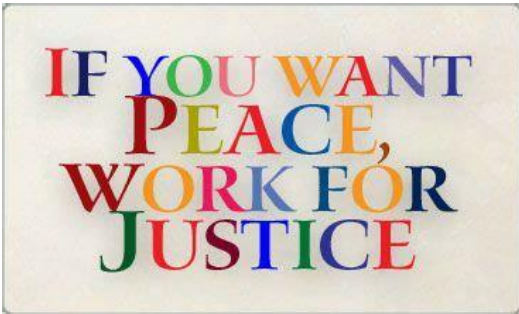
<a href="#">Exodus 22:20-26</a>	You shall not oppress the poor or vulnerable. God will hear their cry.
<a href="#">Leviticus 19:9-10</a>	A portion of the harvest is set aside for the poor and the stranger.
<a href="#">Job 34:20-28</a>	The Lord hears the cry of the poor.
<a href="#">Proverbs 31:8-9</a>	Speak out in defense of the poor.
<a href="#">Sirach 4:1-10</a>	Don't delay giving to those in need.
<a href="#">Isaiah 25:4-5</a>	God is a refuge for the poor.
<a href="#">Isaiah 58:5-7</a>	True worship is to work for justice and care for the poor and oppressed.
<a href="#">Matthew 25:34-40</a>	What you do for the least among you, you do for Jesus.
<a href="#">Luke 4:16-21</a>	Jesus proclaims his mission: to bring good news to the poor and oppressed.
<a href="#">Luke 6:20-23 &amp; Matthew 5:3-7</a>	Blessed are the poor; theirs is the kingdom of God.
<a href="#">1 John 3:17-18</a>	How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's good and sees one in need and refuses to help?

### Tradition

God's word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us: "As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me" ([Mt 25:40](#)). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: "The measure you give will be the measure you get" (Mt 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you . . . For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Lk 6:36-38). What these passages make clear is the absolute priority of "going forth from ourselves toward our brothers and sisters" as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God's completely free gift. (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* [[Evangelii Gaudium](#)], no. 179)

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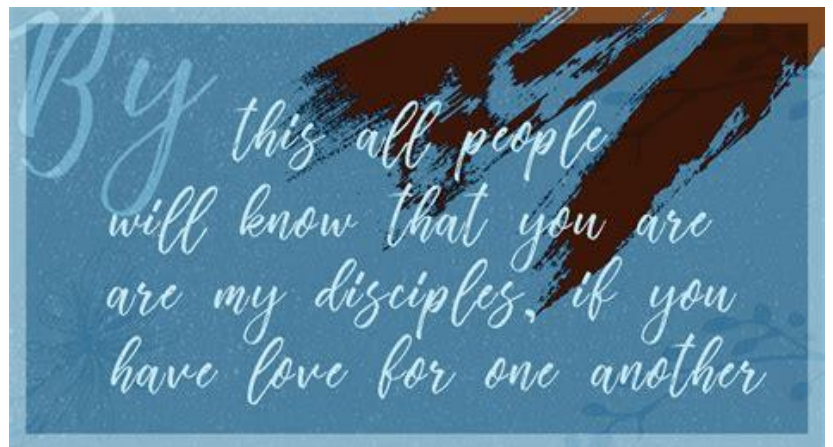
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Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. (St. John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Year [Centesimus Annus]*, no. 58)

The primary purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good. The “option for the poor,” therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. The extent of their suffering is a measure of how far we are from being a true community of persons. These wounds will be healed only by greater solidarity with the poor and among the poor themselves. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [Economic Justice for All](#), no. 88)

The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; the production to meet social needs over production for military purposes. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [Economic Justice for All](#), no. 94)



Faced with a world today where so many people are suffering from want, the council asks individuals and governments to remember the saying of the Fathers: "Feed the people dying of hunger, because if you do not feed them you are killing them," and it urges them according to their ability to share and dispose of their goods to help others, above all by giving them aid which will enable them to help and develop themselves. (Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World [Gaudium et Spes]*, no. 69)