

CTK Mission Principle #11:

We the people of Christ the King, called by God our Father to be surrendered to the Lord Jesus, in the power of His Holy Spirit, in the heart of His Church.

- **to be a people committed to service, responding to the call of the Lord Jesus to be those who “devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor,” especially mindful of the works of mercy, as “it is the duty of all God’s people...to do all in their power to relieve the sufferings of our times.” (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, #40 & #80)**

The fundamental requirement of serving those in need is once again clearly proclaimed in the first reading today, specifically, we are reminded that “The LORD is a God of justice, Who knows no favorites. Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet He hears the cry of the oppressed. The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.” (Sirach 35:12-14). This passage points out the solicitude that the Holy One of Israel has for those in need. However, the responsibility of the People of God to do what is in their power to actively meet that need is also clearly stated. Repeatedly, especially through the prophets, the Chosen People are reminded that they have a fundamental responsibility to care for those in need, the widows, the orphans, the poor, etc. For example, Amos proclaims:

So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.” Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted... (Amos 2:5-7)

This was seen as an expression of Leviticus 19:18, that we should “love your neighbor as yourself.” For the Jewish people that was seen as primarily referring to other members of the Jewish people, but was also extended to others. With the beginning of the Christian era, the Lord Jesus definitively answered the question as to ‘who is my neighbor’ in the parable of the Good Samaritan, giving a response that essentially universalizes the identity of our neighbor to the whole human race.

This responsibility was clearly understood by the early Christians as a call to meet the needs not only of those of the household of faith but of all of those in need. James goes so far as to make it a defining characteristic of religion: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction....” One of the hallmarks of the early Church was how those Christians met the needs of their brothers and sisters and even extended that care to those around them.

The ultimate expression of this is in the parable of the final judgment in which the Lord Jesus condemns those who did not feed Him, did not clothe Him, did not visit Him,

because they did not do these things for the least of His brothers. (Matthew 25:31-46). The Lord Jesus in this parable does not ask whether you went to Mass, or read the Scriptures, or prayed, all of those things we ordinarily associate with our relationship with Him. Instead He asks did we feed those who were hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, etc. The presumption being that if we are doing those religious things that bring us closer to the Lord Jesus, our hearts will be more and more transformed and the results of this, the fruits of this, is that we will reach out with self-sacrificing love and meet the needs of those around us. The judgment is based on the presence of those fruits.

Those needs are seen by the Church as not only referring to the immediate corporal needs but also addresses those broader social issues of justice that should also be the concern of the Christian people. The responsibilities of Christians for the ongoing transformation of the world is a key theme in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, and is also key in many papal documents on the social teaching of the Church, e.g. Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and Blessed Pope John Paul the Great's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

In our time, the battle to secure rights for the unborn has both of these dimensions, that is, meeting the individual's needs as well as bringing about societal change. So, on the one hand there is the need to assist mothers in crisis pregnancies and to do what we can to provide alternatives to the tragic crime of abortion. This involves much work done on the individual level. On the other hand there are also the attempts on the broader, societal level, to bring about institutional change that will result in the adequate legal protection for the unborn, such as a Constitutional amendment granting them legal status and protection.

When the Lord Jesus places the requirement of meeting the needs of those around us in the context of a parable on the Last Judgment, He is making the point as strongly as it can be made. For nothing can be more important to the Christian than those things that directly impact his or her eternal salvation. Do we meet their needs and hear Him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant" or do we fail in it and hear Him pronounce the catastrophic alternative? Let us plead with the Lord Jesus to give each of us a deeper love for those in need, that we may serve them as we ought, both individually and institutionally, that we would cooperate with His grace and build the Kingdom as He intends. The "Joy and Hope" (*Gaudium et Spes*) that the Church offers to the world will then be concretely realized, as the Lord Jesus Himself intends.

Reflection Questions:

For the individual: What can I do to better serve those in need?

For the family: How can we as a family serve the needy more effectively?

For the parish: How can we as a parish be more effective in our outreach to the needy?