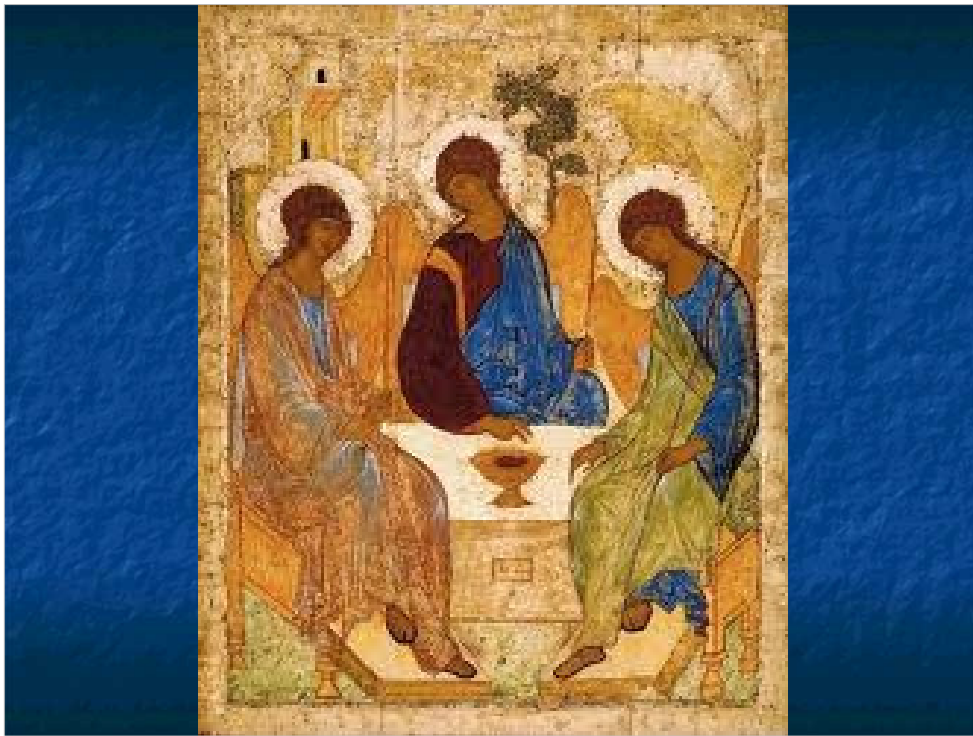
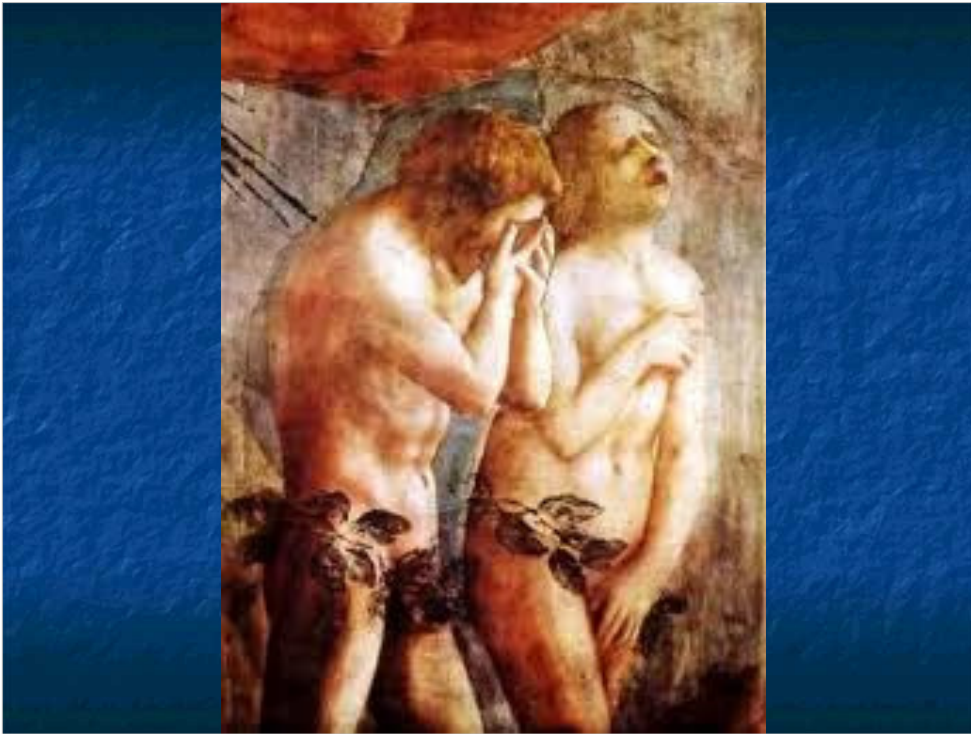


Last year I got the impression that people here didn't really understand what DMF, the Diocesan Ministry Fund, was all about, and that was the reason this parish had never reached its goal before. Once it was better explained, we reached our pledge goal for the first time.

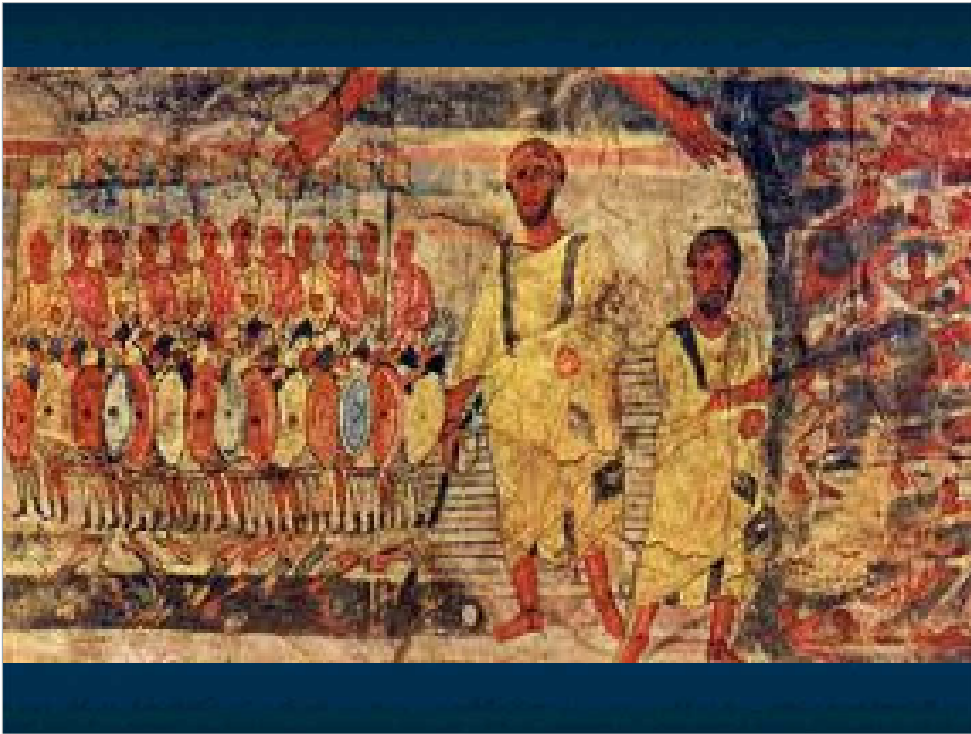
I get the same impression when it comes to our Church's teachings on social justice. I don't think it's really understood, because some people hear the words "social justice" and their eyes start twitching, their faces flush, they get apoplectic, they need a Valium or a blood pressure pill. Something's wrong when people react like that to church teaching. So I'd like to devote 7 or 8 homilies to this topic, doing 1 a month -- 5 before summer, and 2 or 3 after summer. .



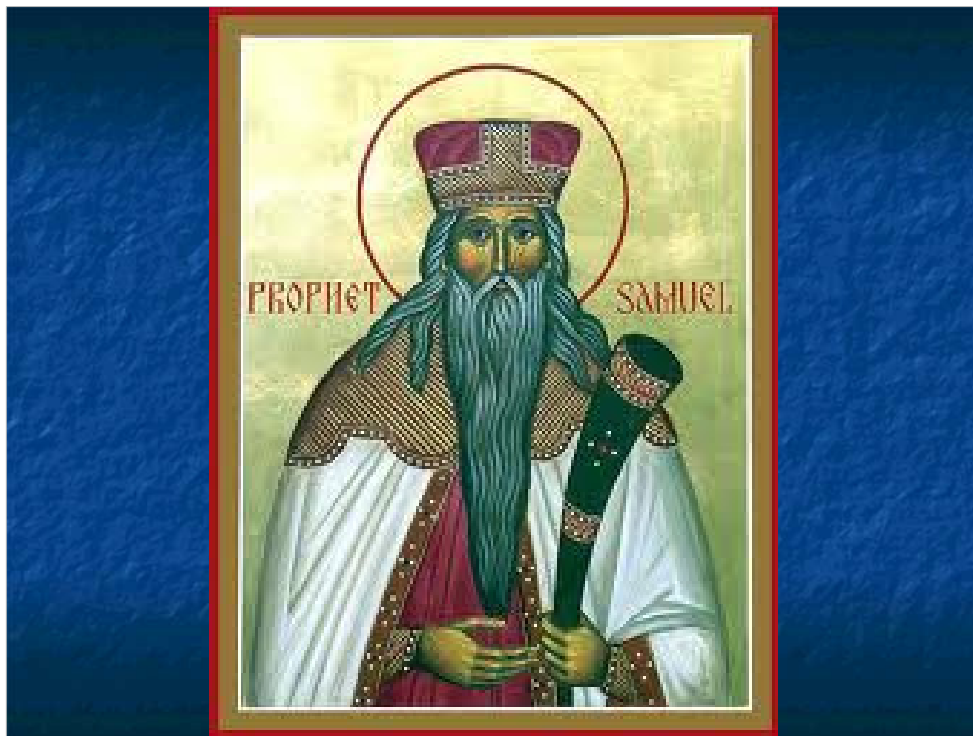
Social justice starts with God. God is social: a trinity, a community of three Persons, who exist in a communion of love and act as one. So when God created human beings in his image, he made them social creatures, like he is. He created us men and women, we complement each other. He intended for us to live in a community of love with each other, and in unity with Him as well.



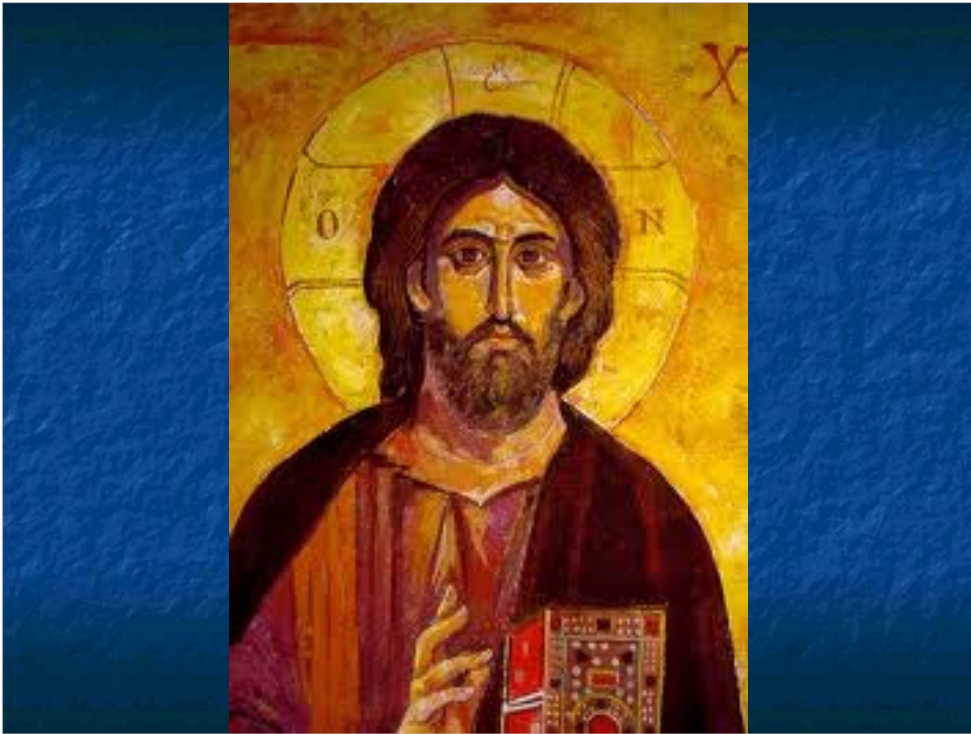
But he also gave us freedom. And then man wanted to be like God and sinned. Man ruptured his relationship with God, and in doing so, he alienated himself not just from others, but even from himself. The consequence was, we got twisted hearts. Sin resulted in selfishness and domination and division in the human family. And as sinners went on to create societies and institutions, sin infested them as well. They included elements of injustice, unfairness.



But we're not stuck with it. First God formed a people of his own, the Israelites, to show his justice to the world. This happened in the Exodus event, when God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God tells his people: don't treat other people the way they treated you in Egypt. The Israelites had short memories. It didn't last. Twisted hearts prevailed again.



A few hundred years later Samuel comes along – the leader we heard about in our First Reading. The Israelites ask him to give them a king, so they can be like all the other nations. They get their wish. And for the first time in their history, homelessness appears. Widows and orphans are on the street, poverty is no longer something temporary -- people get permanently stuck in poverty. Then the prophets are sent by God with a message. They confront their government and people of means who could help. Their message is: if you're not just, if you don't look out for these people, your worship is worthless, and your country will fall. They're ignored. Hoarding continues. And Babylon invades. Their government falls, the people lose everything they have, and they're banished from their own country.

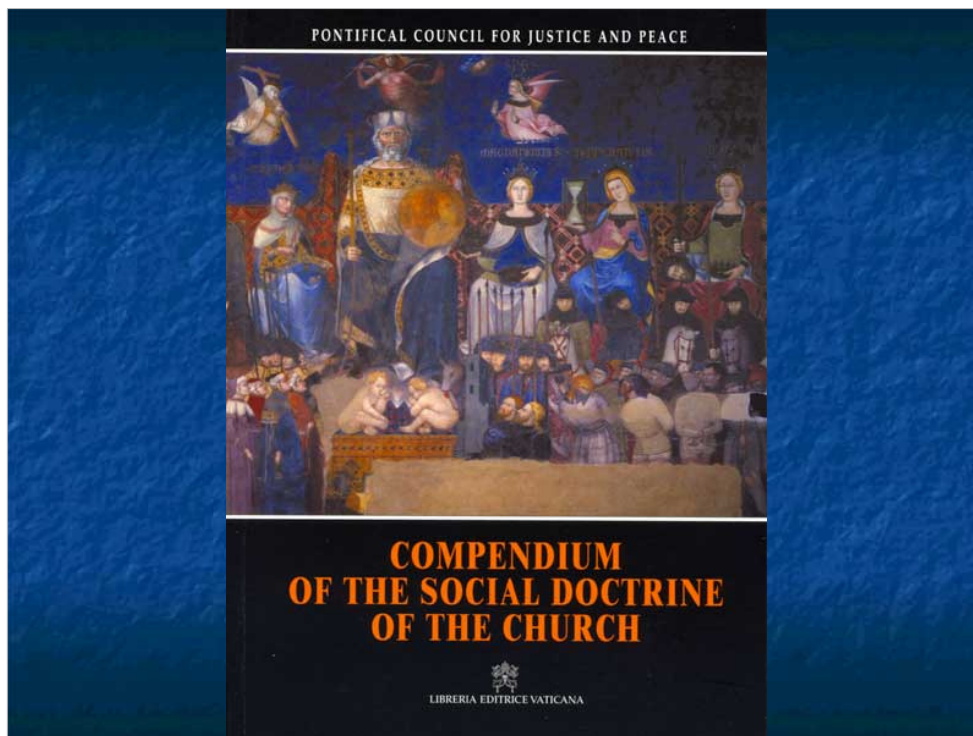


Finally God sends his Son, Jesus. He ministers to the outcasts of society. He comes to welcome sinners into the kingdom of God, not to exclude them. He comes to bring justice to all. He teaches forgiveness, reconciliation. He says the greatest commandment is loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbor like yourself – he makes them equal. His religion and his government reject him. He gets murdered. But his Father vindicates him and raises him from the dead in glory.

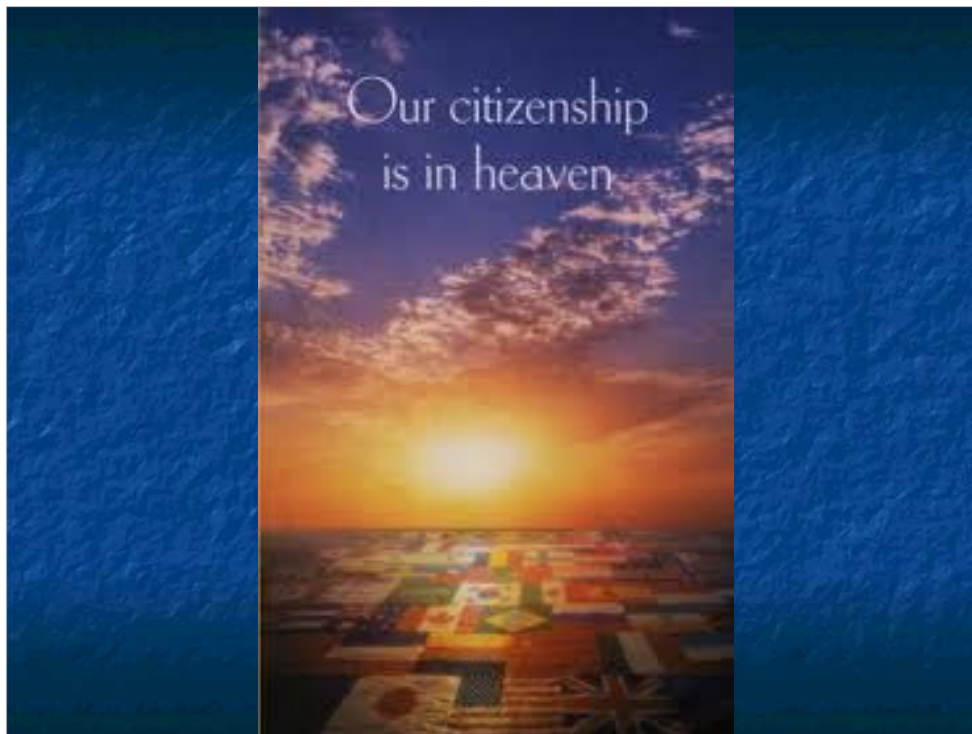
Jesus conquered sin and reconciled us to God and to each other, so we can finally live in a communion of love as God intended for us. Jesus laid the groundwork, and he counts on us, his disciples, to continue his work and bring it to completion: to become loving persons ourselves, and to transform our societies and institutions, to eliminate the sin in them, what's broken in them. The difference now is that he's given us the grace to accomplish this mission, to complete his mission.

We don't do this by throwing food at the poor, or by knocking down our governments and banks and stock markets. That's the communist way. And it doesn't work. We start with our hearts, with wanting justice and fairness for all people. We spread the Good News of Jesus to others and, without forcing anything down anyone's throats, we build up a consensus that will eventually change our society and institutions so they are fair and just to all people. It starts with us, and with how we treat the people who pass through our lives.

The biggest misunderstanding about our Church's teachings on social justice is that people think this is the church meddling in politics. Wrong! The teachings are biblical, not political. Politics has a role to play: it's in the application of the principles. There can be legitimate differences of opinion on how to put the principles into practice in our society. But the principles themselves are not subject to political review because they come from the Bible. And there's only one Bible – not a Democratic edition and a Republican edition.

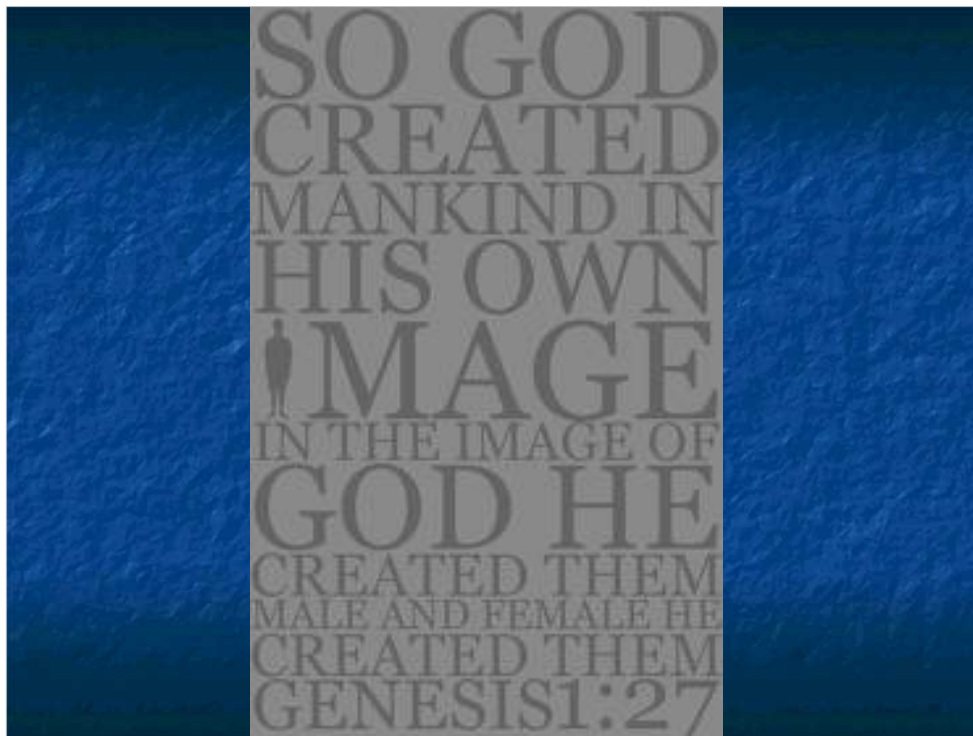


Social justice isn't a recent invention. It's the teachings distilled from the scriptures, from the lived history of the Old and New Testaments. And they are not the personal interpretation of one or two people. They have been identified by literally thousands of theologians, men and women; they have been approved by the world's conferences of Catholic bishops; they have been endorsed by the Pope and the Vatican.

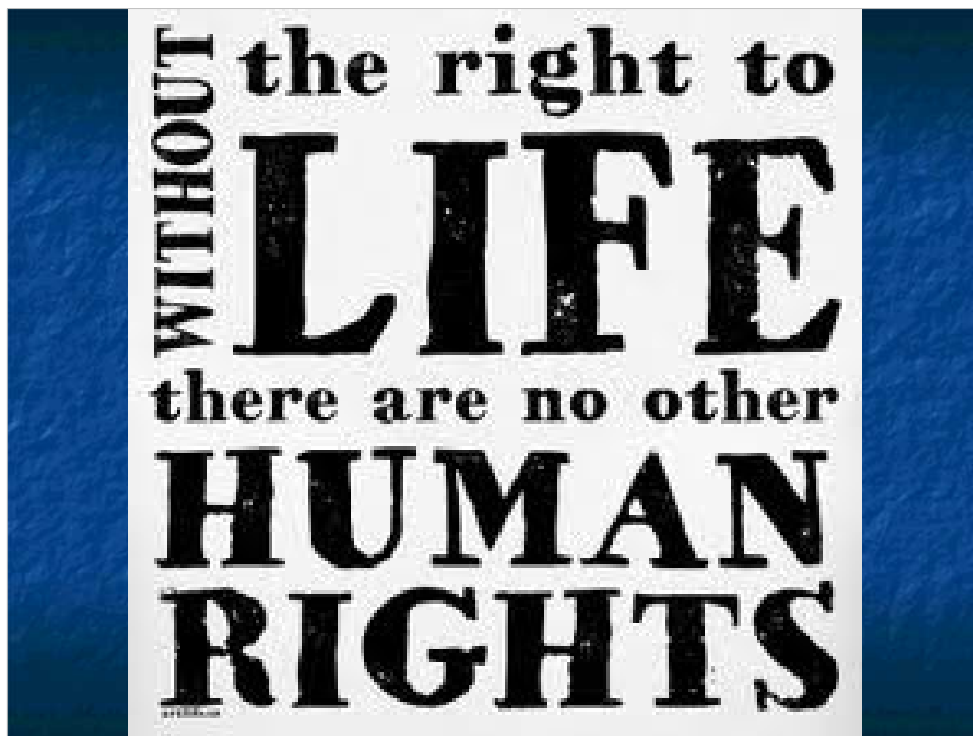


The way it is now, half of our Church's teachings on social justice are embraced by the Republican party; and half of them are reflected in the Democratic party. What's that tell us? It tells us 2 painful things. First, it means that each party only covers half the Gospel. If we tote the party line and put our politics before our faith, we're only half-Catholic. To be authentic Christians, we have to stretch and include the other principles in our hearts, and then let our politics figure out how to make them work. What we cannot do, is allow ourselves or our political parties to ignore the other principles. Because the purpose of our lives is to build up the kingdom of God so we can enter it.

Now let's look at the first principle of social justice. In our second reading today, St. Paul confronts us with his powerful question: Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you? Here is the bedrock principle of Catholic social justice – all the others come out of this one: it's the dignity of the human person, and respect for life from conception until its natural end.



In the story of creation, God makes human beings male and female in the image of God. That's what gives us dignity: because we are made in God's image. Nothing else gives us dignity, or adds to our dignity. This is crystal clear when we look at people with mental illness, or who are developmentally challenged (the people we used to refer to as "retarded"), or with people in a nursing home. People don't have dignity because they're productive; they have dignity because they are made in the image of God.



What are the repercussions of this principle of the dignity of the human person?

The first right is the right to life from conception to its natural end.



We reject the thinking that a fetus is a human being if you want to have the baby, but a fetus is not a human being if you don't want to have the baby. Life has dignity at conception, begins at conception, not matter how inconvenient it might be or how embarrassing it might be.



Men and women have the same dignity, equal dignity, while being different physically and emotionally, and while having different roles to play in the family and in society. Even broader than that, all people in the world share an equal dignity. Nobody is better than me, and I'm not better than anybody else. We don't look down on people, we don't judge people, we don't publicly humiliate people. We don't try to dominate each other.

FROM DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON COMES:

- **RIGHT TO LIFE**
- **EQUAL DIGNITY**
- **UNIQUENESS**

Every person is unique and will not be repeated. Each person has unique life experiences that aren't repeated in someone else. We don't lump people together. They're not all alike. That's why racism is a sin.

FROM DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON COMES:

- **RIGHT TO LIFE**
- **EQUAL DIGNITY**
- **UNIQUENESS**
- **PERSONS ARE NEVER A MEANS
TO AN END**

We don't manipulate someone to get something we want. Persons can never be a means to an end, no matter how noble the cause. We trust that God will work things out for us. People are more important than things.

FROM DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON COMES:

- **RIGHT TO LIFE**
- **EQUAL DIGNITY**
- **UNIQUENESS**
- **PERSONS ARE NEVER A MEANS TO AN END**
- **SOCIETY SERVES THE PERSON**

Because of our dignity, society exists to benefit the human person -- it's not the other way around. The test for any social institution is: does it promote or enhance human dignity? Social institutions are to serve people; people aren't to serve social institutions.

FROM DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON COMES:

- **RIGHT TO LIFE**
- **EQUAL DIGNITY**
- **UNIQUENESS**
- **PERSONS ARE NEVER A MEANS TO AN END**
- **SOCIETY SERVES THE PERSON**
- **RESPECT FOR OUR DIFFERENCES**

We respect our differences. Because each of us has dignity and different life experiences, we don't force our way of thinking or acting on others. We find unity through diversity, not unity through uniformity.



There are other points, but this is intended as an overview and I've run out of time.

Social justice isn't about being a liberal or a conservative or a communist. Social justice is about imitating God. It's not about forcing new systems or structures on people. It is first and foremost a spiritual issue. It's about transforming our twisted hearts, so that we keep our neighbor in our consciousness. Justice can't begin until our hearts are right.