

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- The dignity of life is universal.
- Christians are called to protect life.
- Christians are called to support dignity, justice, and rights for all.

For Catholics, valuing and respecting each human life is more than just avoiding physically harming people. Respecting human life means working to make sure that every person can live with dignity. Living with dignity means living in a way that brings honor and respect to others and yourself. The teachings of Christ demand that we take a stand against anything in society that denies people's rights and dignity.

The Dignity of Life

In a recent experiment, members of half of a freshman class were asked to wear white collars for the day. They were told that they were inferior to their classmates who didn't have to wear the white collars. The "white collars" were forced to do more work in class and were graded more harshly. They were forced to go to lunch last, after all the good choices were gone. Teachers treated them as less intelligent. Before long, the students wearing white collars began to actually feel inferior. More surprisingly, they didn't do as well on their schoolwork as they normally would have.

The following day, the other half of the class wore the white collars, and they experienced the same feelings of inferiority.

- *What does this experiment tell you about how you treat others?*
- *Have you ever been influenced (positively or negatively) by someone else's opinion of you?*



"The Church receives from the Gospel the full revelation of the truth about man. The Church bears witness to man, in the name of Christ, to the dignity of mankind and mankind's vocation to the communion of persons. She teaches him the demands of justice and peace in conformity with divine wisdom."

CCC 2419

Economic Justice

In *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote that every perspective on economic life must be shaped by three questions:

- What does the economy do for people?
- What does it do to people?
- And how do people participate in it?

A country's **economy** is its system for producing, distributing, and consuming wealth, usually in the form of goods and money. The bishops insist that economic decisions have moral consequences because they directly affect the human person by either enhancing or destroying human dignity.

At the time of the bishops' letter (1986), the U.S. economy was experiencing tremendous productivity, yet thirty-three million people remained poor. The bishops wrote their letter not to condemn the United States or its wealthy citizens but to urge Catholics and other citizens to face the reality of poverty.

"Only, we were to be mindful of the poor, which is the very thing I was eager to do."

Galatians 2:10

True charity goes beyond just ending misery or alleviating needs. It demands genuine love for the person. We respect and care about others because they, like us, are children of God.

The U.S. bishops named ways that society can work toward building the dignity of the poor. Many of these things don't require you to have power or money yourself. You can further the mission of caring for the poor in simple ways.

Think about:

- How do you treat the students in your class who don't have the money to buy the "right" clothes or electronics?
- Do you actively participate in school, church, and community programs that serve the needs of the poor?
- Do you educate yourself about the real causes of poverty, rather than assuming stereotypes are accurate?
- Do you see the suffering Christ in the faces of the poor?

• *What are some ways you can help the poor in your area?*



Equality: One Creator, One Destiny

"...When [the Church] fulfills her mission of proclaiming the Gospel, she bears witness to man, in the name of Christ, to his dignity and his vocation to the communion of persons."

CCC 2419

All people—regardless of their race, religion, gender, national origin, sexual preference, political party, or language—must be treated with equal dignity. All people have been created by God and are called to spend eternity with God in heaven.

While most of us agree with such statements about equality, we have all also been exposed to prejudice toward one group or another. **Prejudice** is an unfavorable judgment or opinion about someone that is formed without knowing the facts or in spite of the facts. Prejudice is often rooted in fear. It is almost always the product of ignorance.

Today the bishops challenge us to work toward abolishing all forms of prejudice through our attitudes and actions in our schools, families, organizations, athletic groups, and circles of friends.

The Second Vatican Council noted that "every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome...as contrary to God's intent....Such is the case of the woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men" (Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 29).

Think about:

- Do you form opinions of people when you first meet them based on money or how they look?
- Have you ever viewed people as being more or less intelligent based on their gender or ethnicity?
- Do you treat people differently depending on who else is around?
- Do you strive to see how all people contribute to the body of Christ?

• *How can you continue to put the dignity of others first in your relationships?*



The Stewardship of Creation

"God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day."

Genesis 1:31

Christian concern for the environment begins with understanding the natural world as God's gift to us. Our Christian tradition teaches us that we must exercise responsible stewardship. We must treasure the gift of creation through the wise use of natural resources and by working to preserve the earth.

In his writing, *On Social Concerns*, Pope St. John Paul II said animals, plants, and natural things cannot be used "simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system..." More recently in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis wrote, "The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God...We are not God. The earth was here before us, and it has been given to us" (66–67). Care for creation is an area where you can really make a difference.

Think about:

- Do I do everything I can to keep the natural world around me clean and unspoiled?
- Do I always dispose of my trash properly?
- Do I take the time to pick up trash that others have carelessly left?
- Do I influence my peers to recycle?
- Do I educate myself about products that are harmful to the environment and then seek to avoid them?
- Do I do positive things for my little corner of the world, such as planting trees and gardens?

• What are some other ways you can have a positive effect on the world around you?



The Work of the World

In our society, work is commonly considered something we do so we can have the money to do what we really want. Church teaching offers a far richer perspective on the meaning and value of work for humanity. Pope St. John Paul II tells us, "Life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity" (*On Human Work [Laborem exercens]*, 1). The world of work needs our attention because it can be either a way to build up the dignity of human beings or destroy it.

The Church warns that human labor should never be thought of as just another resource in the production process, like money, technology, or raw materials. No matter what work we do, we are human beings who must be treated with respect and paid a fair wage. Work should never be degrading.

The U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, "Work is not only for oneself. It is for one's family, for the nation, and indeed for the benefit of the entire human family" (*Economic Justice for All*). When we find ourselves in the workplace, whether it's a part-time job or our future career, it's important to consider the moral significance of our choice. We must consider not only our personal interests, talents, and needs but also the effect our work will have on the world as a whole.

Think about:

- How can I make the world a better place through my work?
- Do I consistently put my best effort behind what I do?
- Do I treat all my coworkers with respect, even when I disagree with them?
- When I go out to a restaurant or a store, do I treat the people serving me with dignity and respect?

• What are some ways you can bring the love of Christ into your work, whether it's a school project, part-time job, or volunteer position?





As a group, read the anecdote and answer the questions.

Christopher Wren, a great English architect, walked unrecognized among workers building St. Paul's Cathedral in London. "What are you doing?" he asked one of the workers, and the man replied, "I am cutting a piece of stone." As he went on he asked the same question to another man, who replied, "I am earning five shillings two pence a day." To a third he asked the same and the man answered, "I am helping to build a cathedral."

How does the response of each man show his attitude toward his work?

How does the response of the third man reflect the teaching of the Catholic Church?

How is the third man's point of view related to the dignity of life?

Think about areas in your school, neighborhood, or community where you see inequalities.

Try to come up with one small way you can improve the situation.

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