

February 21/22, 2026: The First Sunday of Lent

Good evening/morning. I am [name] and I serve [as a Lector/on the Liturgy Committee/with the St. Joseph Workers for Justice]. Lent in our parish marks the return of our Liturgical Moments Series. This Lent, we will explore Catholic Social Teaching – the Church’s vision for how our faith calls us to engage with the world around us.

Catholic Social Teaching, or CST, articulates the Church’s understanding about how we can build a just society and live our faith in the world. This wisdom is deeply rooted in scripture: When Jesus proclaims in Luke’s gospel that he has come to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, and freedom to the oppressed, he is articulating the values that underlie all of Catholic Social Teaching.

Likewise, the liturgy itself is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching. The liturgy is social in nature. The community gathers in prayer and is sent forth to the world in mission. The Eucharist enables us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to put his teachings into practice. And each time we pray the Our Father at mass, asking that God’s Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, we are praying for the world that Catholic Social Teaching envisions. The liturgy

shapes us to conform to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; Catholic Social Teaching empowers us to live out that Gospel in the world today.

While CST is grounded in the Gospel and the mass, it became a more systematized body of literature beginning in the late 19th century when Pope Leo XIII's, encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, addressed the severe social, economic, and ethical crises caused by the Industrial Revolution.

Most importantly, CST is not just abstract theology – it has real implications for how we live. Catholic Social Teaching gives us a frame to do three things: Reflect, Judge, and Act. In reflecting, we recognize injustice; in judging, we evaluate individual behavior and social structures; and in acting, we work toward justice and love.

This is why both Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV have spoken so clearly about issues of justice and peace in our world. And this is why our own Cardinal Tobin and other bishops have raised their voices on issues like immigration policy. Some people ask, Why is the pope speaking out about politics? Why are the bishops doing so? The answer is found in one of the key principles of Catholic Social Teaching: PARTICIPATION.

The principle of PARTICIPATION teaches that all people have a right and a duty to participate in society and to work for the good of all, especially the most vulnerable. The Church participates in public life not to gain power, but to be a voice for those who are often unheard.

Catholic Social Teaching calls all of us – not just popes and bishops – to be active participants in building God’s Kingdom here on earth. It invites us to see every political and social question through the lens of the Gospel, to ask ourselves: How does this policy, this law, this action affect the most vulnerable among us?

This Lent, we will explore how the principles of Catholic Social Teaching can guide our participation in the world and ultimately help us fulfill our responsibility to care for one another.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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February 28/March 1, 2026: The Second Sunday of Lent

Good evening/morning. I am [name] and I serve [as a Lector/on the Liturgy Committee/with the St. Joseph Workers for Justice.] This Lent, our Liturgical Moments are exploring Catholic Social Teaching, the Church's vision for how our faith engages with the world. Last week, we introduced CST and discussed why the Church speaks out on social and political issues. This week, we turn to the very foundation of Catholic Social Teaching: the DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON.

Scripture teaches us that human dignity is rooted in our creation as the image and likeness of God. This means that every single person – regardless of nationality, immigration status, race, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, socioeconomic class, or any other characteristic – possesses an inherent dignity that must be respected and protected. This is not a dignity we earn or that can be taken away; it is a gift from God that belongs to us simply because we are human. Nothing can remove our inherent dignity; any violation of our dignity is not merely an affront to humankind, but to God.

In recent weeks, we have witnessed immigration enforcement actions that have raised profound moral questions about human

dignity. Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recently asserted that “The current climate of fear and polarization, which thrives when HUMAN DIGNITY is disregarded, does not meet the standard set by Christ in the Gospel...”¹

When federal agents separate a five-year-old child from his family, when protesters exercising their First Amendment rights are killed, when immigrants – documented or not – live in fear, Catholic Social Teaching demands that we ask: Where is the recognition of human dignity? What is the role of government in protecting human dignity?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a “Special Message” at their Plenary meeting last November where they said, “As pastors, we the bishops of the United States are bound to our people by ties of communion and compassion in Our Lord Jesus Christ.... We are saddened by the state of contemporary debate and the vilification of immigrants.... Catholic teaching exhorts nations to

¹ <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/us-bishops-issue-special-message-immigration-plenary-assembly-baltimore>

recognize the fundamental DIGNITY of all persons, including immigrants.”²

The bishops are not speaking as Democrats or Republicans, but as shepherds applying the ancient wisdom of Catholic Social Teaching to contemporary events. They are asking us to see every person – citizen or immigrant, adult or child – as made in the image of God, possessing a dignity that must be honored.

Catholic Social Teaching challenges us to examine our own hearts and to ask ourselves: Do I truly see the face of Christ in every person? Do I recognize that an attack on the dignity of the most vulnerable is an attack on all of us? How can I help create a government that also recognizes the dignity of all? This Lent, may we recommit ourselves to defending the God-given dignity of every human person.

Thank you for listening.

² <https://www.usccb.org/news/2026/archbishop-coakley-calls-holy-hour-moment-renewal-our-hearts-and-our-nation>

March 7/8, 2026: The Third Sunday of Lent

Good evening/morning. I am [name] and I serve [as a Lector/on the Liturgy Committee/with the St. Joseph Workers for Justice]. This Lent, we are reflecting on Catholic Social Teaching and its application to contemporary issues. Last week we focused on the dignity of the human person. This week, we turn to two closely related principles: the COMMON GOOD and SOLIDARITY.

The COMMON GOOD is the sum of all those conditions of social life that allow people to reach their full potential as human beings. It is not simply the greatest good for the greatest number, but rather the creation of a society where every person can flourish. Catholic Social Teaching insists that we cannot pursue our individual good at the expense of others, and that the health of society is measured by how well the most vulnerable members are faring.

SOLIDARITY is the virtue that flows from recognizing our interdependence. We are all part of one human family, and the suffering of one member affects us all. Pope John Paul II taught that solidarity is not a vague feeling of compassion, but rather a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. It

requires us to see ourselves in others and to work actively for their good as if it were our own, because we are all responsible for all.

Just last month our own Cardinal Tobin spoke powerfully about the common good and solidarity in the context of immigration enforcement. Speaking on a national interfaith prayer call on January 25th, Cardinal Tobin said that in the face of policies that separate families and endanger lives, we must all say no. Drawing on a novel about resistance to fascism, he reminded us that even one person who says no – who scrawls it on a wall, who speaks truth to power – can make a difference.

Then, in an interview on PBS NewsHour on January 28th, Cardinal Tobin was asked what compelled him to speak out. His answer was clear: The principle motivator was a concern for the common good. He explained that Catholic Social Teaching asks us to look beyond competing individual rights to ask how policies affect the common good of all – refugees, immigrants, and citizens alike. Every person’s dignity and safety contribute to or diminishes the common good.

Cardinal Tobin also urged Catholics to exercise SOLIDARITY through concrete action – by standing at the gates of detention centers, by bringing comfort to detainees and their families, by

insisting on the rights of the vulnerable, and by telling their elected representatives to vote against funding for what he called a lawless organization. He reminded us that solidarity is not passive sympathy, but active love.

As members of this parish in the Archdiocese of Newark, we are blessed to have a shepherd who so clearly articulates Catholic Social Teaching and calls us to live it out. Cardinal Tobin's words challenge us: How will we say no to injustice? How will we practice solidarity with the most vulnerable? How will we work for the common good, even when it requires sacrifice or discomfort?

This Lent, may we hear his call and respond with courage and love.

Thank you for your attention.

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March 14/15, 2026: The Fourth Sunday of Lent

Good evening/morning. I am [name] and I serve [as a Lector/on the Liturgy Committee/with the St. Joseph Workers for Justice]. This Lent, our Liturgical Moments are exploring Catholic Social Teaching. Today we turn to perhaps the most challenging principle for those of us who live in comfort: the PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR.

The preferential option for the poor teaches that in our personal lives, in our parish community, and in our society’s policies, we must give special attention to the needs of those who are most vulnerable. The US Bishops wrote that “As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental “option for the poor” — to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess lifestyles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor.”³ This is not because the poor are more deserving than others, but because the systematic impoverishment of millions of people denies their HUMAN DIGNITY and undermines the COMMON GOOD.

³ Economic Justice for All, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986, #24

In Matthew 25, Jesus reminds us, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). The preferential option for the poor is putting love for Jesus into action.

This principle is intimately connected to ECONOMIC JUSTICE, which calls us to structure our economy to serve all people, not just the wealthy. Catholic Social Teaching insists that the economy exists to serve people, not the other way around. Workers deserve fair wages, safe conditions, and the right to organize. No one should lack the basic necessities of life in a society of abundance. God destined the earth and its goods "for all," and each person must have access to what is needed for full development and human flourishing; this is a basic principle of the social order.

One of the great witnesses to the preferential option for the poor in American Catholic history is Dorothy Day. Born in 1897, Day was a journalist and activist who co-founded the Catholic Worker movement in 1933, during the depths of the Great Depression. The Catholic Worker combined direct service to the poor with advocacy for economic justice and peace.

Dorothy Day opened houses of hospitality where homeless and hungry people could find a meal, a bed, and most importantly, have their dignity affirmed. She insisted that the poor were not problems to be solved, but brothers and sisters to be welcomed.

But Dorothy Day did not stop with charity. She also demanded justice. She marched with workers on picket lines, protested unjust wars, and called for an economic system that would make charity unnecessary. She famously said, “The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us.”

Dorothy Day’s life challenges us to ask: Do I see Christ in the poor? Do I recognize that my abundance comes with a responsibility to share? Am I willing to question economic structures that leave so many behind? Do I understand that the Gospel demands both charity and justice?

This Lent, following Dorothy Day’s example, may we open our hearts to a revolution of love that transforms both ourselves and our world.

Thank you for listening.

March 21/22, 2026: The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Good evening/morning. I am [name] and I serve [as a Lector/on the Liturgy Committee/with the St. Joseph Workers for Justice]. Today, as we celebrate the fifth Sunday of Lent, we come to our final Liturgical Moment of the season. Over the past weeks, we have explored several principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Today we turn to CARE FOR CREATION and its connection to PEACE.

Care for creation teaches us that the earth is not ours to exploit, but a gift from God that we must steward for future generations. Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'* reminds us that everything is connected – environmental degradation, poverty, and injustice are all intertwined. When we destroy ecosystems, the poor suffer most. When we disrupt the climate, we threaten peace. Care for creation is thus inseparable from the pursuit of justice and peace.

For decades, Catholic nuns have been quietly leading the way on ecological responsibility. Right here in New Jersey, at Genesis Farm in Blairstown, Dominican Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis founded one of the world's first eco-learning centers in 1988. Genesis Farm teaches that understanding the earth helps us understand our

relationship with God. At Genesis Farm sustainable agriculture is practiced as a spiritual discipline.

In Pennsylvania, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ fought to keep a natural gas pipeline off their land, arguing that care for creation is a sacred duty. Their witness shows us that protecting the environment sometimes requires us to stand up to powerful interests.

But sisters are not just protecting land – they are also using their financial power for good. The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, led by Sister Nora Nash, engage in shareholder activism, using their retirement investments to pressure corporations to reduce their environmental impact. They have shown up at shareholder meetings to insist that corporations have a moral responsibility to protect both people and the planet.

The Sisters of Loretto, based in Kentucky but active nationwide, have turned away from fossil fuels and continue to advocate for climate justice.

These women religious understand what Catholic Social Teaching proclaims: that war and violence ravage not only human communities but also the earth itself; that environmental

destruction leads to resource scarcity, which fuels conflict. When we care for creation, we are also working for peace.

The example of these religious sisters challenges us to ask: What is my relationship with creation? Do I see the earth as sacred? Am I willing to make changes in my own life – in how I consume, how I invest, how I vote – to protect God’s creation? Do I understand that care for the environment is not a political issue, but a moral and spiritual one?

This Lent, we have explored Catholic Social Teaching – from the dignity of the human person to the common good, from the preferential option for the poor to care for creation. These principles are not separate teachings, but different facets of one coherent vision: that God calls us to build a world where every person can flourish, where justice and peace embrace, and where all creation is honored.

Thank you again for your kind attention. Please fill out one of the feedback forms in the back of church to let us know your thoughts on this series.