



BACKGROUND

Explaining Christian SOLIDARITY

'solidarity' means basically that we are all really responsible for one another
It is not about a vague sort of compassion or shallow sadness at others' misfortune;
'solidarity' involves a determination to commit oneself to working for change so that
all people will be able to reach their potential.

We are all one family in the world. Building a community that empowers everyone to attain their full potential through each of us respecting each other's dignity, rights and responsibilities makes the world a better place to live.

Sollicitudo Rei socialis – 'On Social Concern' (1987)

"Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."

Joseph Donders, John Paul II: The Encyclicals in Everyday Language

Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, near and far, rather it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."

(Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)

What is solidarity?

Solidarity is the reason we are 'all in this together', and it is for that reason that we are all responsible for one another. Solidarity is the glue that binds together, the common good, the universal destination of goods, equality amongst people and nations, and peace in the world. In some sense solidarity includes all the other principles and values that are necessary to create and sustain a truly good society.

In fact it is not too big a claim to say that solidarity is at the heart of what it means to be human; and with Catholic Social Teaching we can take this further and say that solidarity is also at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic Christian.

Extracts on solidarity

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A bond between people

As humans we are fundamentally social beings. Regardless of whether they have a belief in God or practice a faith, people instinctively feel that there is a deep bond between us all; a bond that goes beyond family and kin to extend to the whole human race. The name of this bond is solidarity. This bond is much more than a “feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress”. It is in fact a commitment to the common good, i.e. “the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all Sollicitudo Rei Socialis.”

Solidarity is what is meant in Ephesians 4:25 when St Paul writes that we are all “members one of another”. So the opposites of solidarity are things like inequality, exploitation and oppression, as well greed and selfishness. It is the value which requires that human rights are defended by the Church. Solidarity demands that all people have a right to food and drinkable water, to housing, to security, to self-determination, family life and to independence. Solidarity runs backwards and forwards through time, linking us not only with the other people who are alive at this moment but also with all past and future generations.

Solidarity between generations means that it is morally wrong as well as economically counter productive to burden future generations with the costs of current activities. Probably the only way to ensure harmony and balance between the requirements of economic efficiency and the need for political participation and social justice is to have the value of solidarity at the heart of global political and economic systems.

Solidarity and God

The heart of solidarity is the life of Jesus, because it is through the incarnation that God is in a very real way in solidarity with humanity and that we are in solidarity with God. The historical reality of the life of Jesus as a human being lifts solidarity beyond the fellowship of people into something altogether more mystical and powerful. In addition, because we know, as Christians, that all of us are formed in the image of God, loving our neighbour (as an act of solidarity) becomes also an act of solidarity towards and with God. Every act of solidarity, understood in this light, becomes an act of communion with God; an action in which we transmit and reflect the love with which God loves both the person who is object of the action and with which we love God. The ability to recognise God in every individual person and to recognise every individual in God is necessary for authentic human development. Our belief in this and our faith as Christians draws us ever more strongly into a state of unity with each other and with God. Founded in solidarity Catholic Social Teaching becomes the life blood of the reciprocity between God and humanity and the Eucharist is the sacrament of solidarity.

What does it mean to practice solidarity?

Solidarity is much more than an idealistic principle for organising society; basically it is a moral value. More than this, solidarity exists not only between individuals but also within and between social institutions. So we can speak (and think) of solidarity between nations, between towns, between parishes. A concrete way in which this solidarity is expressed is in twinning arrangements between towns or parishes in different countries. Also just as there can be structural sin, for example racism which is institutionalised within an organisation, there can also be structural solidarity where relations of mutuality and interdependence are institutionalised and celebrated.

Signs of solidarity in practice are: love and service of neighbour, for example; social action, for example setting up a winter shelter for homeless people or campaigning to stop the deportation of an asylum seeker ; and mutual respect, for example buying a copy of the Big Issue rather than giving money to a beggar, or any serious engagement with people across a divide whether of race, religion, age or social background. It is the practice of solidarity, even in simple ways, that guarantees the common good and the fostering of integral human development.

Solidarity and love/caritas

For solidarity to be a Christian practice it must be permeated by love (caritas). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus connect solidarity and charity (caritas). In fact solidarity is the expression of caritas, or to put it another way, love is the verb of solidarity. Solidarity is the virtue and the practice underlying the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself. (Matthew 10:40-42, 20:25; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27) If we all really lived the value of solidarity there would be both global peace and strenuous action to halt and reverse climate change: “opus solidarities pax” (peace is the fruit of solidarity) (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis # 568, Isaiah 32:17, James 3:18)