



DIGNITY AND EQUALITY OF EACH HUMAN PERSON



“The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of colour, religion, talent, place of birth or residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all.”

Pope Francis, On Fraternity and Social Friendship



We believe that we are all made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1). This lies at the heart of Catholic social teaching: that every single person deserves to be treated with respect because of their inherent dignity as a child of God.

Pope Francis talks of “learning to find Jesus in the face of others, in their voices, in their pleas” (Joy of the Gospel, 91). Remember the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, where Jesus is asked when they have helped him. He says it's whenever they have helped anyone in need, whether hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or in prison.

It's an idea we often hear, but do we truly accept it? How does it affect the way in which we treat one another? Our family, our friends and colleagues, the people we meet on the street, and even those we may never meet but are also our sisters and brothers across the world?

It's about how we share our love with others, which we're all called to do as Christians. We're called to be a Caritas people. The Latin word, *caritas*, means love, charity, justice, and is at the heart of Catholic social teaching. How we live this love in action, inspired by the guideline of human dignity, is our backdrop as we explore the other principles of Catholic social teaching.

Sarah has long been retired and has been a parishioner at St Philomena's Church for most of her life. Many of her friends have died, and those who still live close by struggle, like her, to get out of the house. Every day she prays for those she knows, and looks forward to Mary coming once a week to give her Communion. Six months ago, an older people's group started to meet on the first Sunday of the month. Martin calls around to pick Sarah up. Martin's always got a story to tell, walks Sarah to the car and back again. When they all get together they can't help but share stories of times gone by, have a good laugh, and share some of the struggles they're experiencing. Sarah feels valued, loved and supported.



“Then God said: ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’”

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26-27

REFLECTION

Spend some time in quiet prayer, giving thanks for all people – those whom you know, those whom you have never met.

- People from your local community you may recognise but have never spoken with.
- People you see on TV or in newspapers from around the world.
- People who are forced to leave their homes for the safety of their families

Using the model from Cardinal Cardijn, reflect on where human dignity is not being upheld locally and globally, what our faith calls us to do about it, and what actions we may be able to take to enable all people to flourish.

Where can you see people unable to live in dignity?

SEE

As people of faith, how are we called to love our sisters and brothers?

JUDGE

What concrete action can you take to enable all people to flourish?

ACT



The guiding principle... of all the Church's social doctrine, is a correct view of the human person and of their unique value.

Pope Saint John Paul II, One Hundred Years, 11

The principle of human dignity – that we all have a unique worth not because of anything we do, but because we are made by God – is central to Catholic social teaching.



ACTION

Spend five minutes noting down any people, individuals and groups of people, locally, nationally, globally, whose dignity is unable to flourish. They may not be able to live lives to the full. How might you enable them to live their lives to the full?



GET INVOLVED!

Consider being involved in organisations that have a mission to support people whose dignity is diminished. For example, in the Diocese of Westminster, St Joseph's Pastoral Centre invites volunteers to assist in their work accompanying people with learning difficulties and befriending families, and Caritas Bakhita House provides a means of how you can tackle human trafficking and modern slavery www.caritaswestminster.org.uk

Union of Catholic Mothers: diocesan and national association supporting family life, and sanctity in the home www.ucm.org.uk

Volunteering with organisations which support the elderly, for example, the hospital visiting rota in your parish; Age UK; volunteering to bring someone to Mass, or even parish bingo

Catholic Children's Society – assisting children and families in need

PACT work with parishes to support prisoners and their families prisonadvice.org.uk

PARISH PLAN

Think about gathering a few times to look together at how we can respond to the needs of our local community in the light of what we're learning in Love in action.

Resources and ideas are available to help identify the needs of the community and plan how to respond.

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