In his opening Mass as chief shepherd of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis spoke to the hundreds of thousands attending: “The pontiff must open his arms to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important.” From the very day of his election, Pope Francis has been pointing to new and active concern for the many in our world who do not share enough of the world’s resources to realize their human potential or provide adequately for their families. In his first encounter with journalists following his election, he said: “Ah, how I would like a church that is poor and is for the poor.” These are challenging statements for all of us to ponder. Do I want to be part of a poor church? How am I to be poor? Many of our parishes (including our own) are experiencing the difficult economic times of our nation. Pope Francis himself has chosen a simpler lifestyle, involving his living quarters, his papal dress, and his transportation. Are we all being called to do with less and join more closely in solidarity with brothers and sisters who suffer poverty around the world?

The new Pope (the former Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, Argentina) was chosen to be successor of St. Peter at a time when our world has never been more unequal in what people possess, or more economically volatile or environmentally unsustainable. This is a world where 870 million men, women and children go to bed hungry every night, and where nearly one billion people have no access to clean water. It is a world where whole countries are threatened with...
Letter from the Editor

For those of us who may be conscious of the delicate divide between religion and politics, it may be helpful to recall that when the Declaration of Independence stated that all men are created equal, it was a subtle extrapolation of the accepted wisdom found in the very first book of the bible: ‘God created us in his own image and likeness’ (Gn 1: 27). Though there were some attempts in the distant past to apply this simple truth in practice, the United States of America became the first nation in history to codify equality of personhood in the laws of the nation. Students of history will be aware that this was a matter held in principle rather than as a reality, as slavery was tolerated, women were denied the right of suffrage and the poor and uneducated were kept on the fringes of society. Nonetheless, the groundwork had been laid and there was a trajectory of progress in the realization of democracy in our country.

Pope Francis has called for ethical financial reforms, maintaining that people have struggled to live, and frequently in an undignified way, under the dictatorship of an economy which lacked any real human goal. Pope Benedict XVI had stated in his papacy that the market was not the master of us all, but rather a tool that had to be used for the benefit of everyone, and that every human has the right to flourish to his or her furthest potential.

The Pope asks those who have more of the world’s resources and “those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political, and social life to be protectors of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another, and of the environment.” I believe we can hear Pope Francis speaking to all of us in our favored part of the world, asking us to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi who chose poverty over riches and who truly loved and cared for the poor of his day. St. Francis once remarked to his religious brothers, “It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching.”

Pastor’s Message Cont. from Pg. 1

bankruptcy and seemingly stable regimes can collapse because of the price of grain. Sadly it is a world of manmade climate change and the plundering of creation for the few at the expense of the many.

The Catholic Church, throughout its history, has worked for and alongside the poorest people in the world. According to statistics presented by CAFOD, the official Catholic Agency for Overseas Development in England and Wales, the Catholic Church provides an estimated 25 percent of the care worldwide for people living with HIV and AIDS. It runs more than 5,000 hospitals, with nearly half of those located in Africa and the Americas. The Catholic Health Association is the largest group of non-profit care providers in the United States. The Catholic Church runs nearly 20,000 clinics around the world, more than 15,000 homes for the elderly, those who are terminally ill and the disabled, and nearly 10,000 orphanages, mainly in Asia.

Although an emphasis on care for the poor may be important for how the church is viewed by the rest of the world, this new emphasis by Pope Francis is not a “reformist” agenda. Our church has worked for and with the poor throughout its history. But the Holy Father is calling us to bring a whole new energy to this concern for those most in need in the world. And he is asking us to look at our lifestyles and see whether we have too much, whether we spend too much on ourselves and are deeply entangled in a consumer way of life.

At St. Jerome we are attempting to live more simply, reflecting the lesser income of the past five years. It is unfortunate that we have had to reduce wages and benefits for our parish staff. They are vital co-workers along with the priests. As we continue on the journey of our parish mission, in God’s providence we hope it will become possible to restore the benefits for our cherished co-workers. But it will also be important that we each examine our daily way of living to discover how we may imitate the Holy Father in his own simplicity and respond with the greatest possible generosity to his call to “embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity.”

However, from the very beginning of our nation there was a tug-o-war going on between those who wanted only the wealthy, landed gentry to enjoy the right to govern, and those who wanted all citizens to participate in ruling the nation. Thomas Jefferson wrote “the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.” On the other hand, men like James Madison and John Adams felt that power should be invested in “the wealth of the nation,” “the more capable set of men” who recognize the responsibility to protect against the “tyranny of the majority.”

This battle to preserve privilege of the few continues until this day. We are presently witnessing attempts in several states to disenfranchise voters. The Supreme Court, in what can easily be construed as an anti-democratic decision, declared the McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Reform Act. This noble experiment to moderate the influence of money in electoral politics was brought to an abrupt halt by decree of the Supreme Court. This was followed by the Citizens United decision, which endowed corporations with a fictitious personhood, enabling them to spend unlimited amounts of money to support candidates of their choice as an expression of free speech. It doesn’t require any special insight to understand that a corporation of stockholders with its deep pockets can influence the outcome of elections more effectively than the limited resources of the common man.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis once argued, “We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we can’t have both.” Never has this truth become more ominously apparent than at the present time. The days of the robber barons may be past, but more insidious, better organized and now well-funded foundations are overwhelming the fragile efforts of grassroots groups to speak for the common
Whoever heard of such a thing…?

- Frank Campagna -

In office only 7 months and already soliciting the Peoples’ opinion on a major topic! Yes, my namesake has been a busy prelate.

January 1 in 2014 marked the 47th World Day of Peace, celebrated worldwide, and Pope Francis chose as the topic for his message: Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace. He declares, "In the face of the many tragedies that afflict the family of nations – poverty, hunger, underdevelopment, conflicts, migrations, pollution, inequalities, injustice, organized crime, fundamentalisms – fraternity is the foundation and pathway to peace.” He observes right off, “…fraternity is first learned in the family…” and “The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such is the foundation and the first pathway to peace…” The concept of fraternity is the basis for a moral economy, moral society and moral relationships among nations.

With the whole world waiting for his and other world leaders’ proclamations embodied in their Day of Peace messages, Francis singles out the family as the panacea to establish peace worldwide…which brings us back to his survey of the faithful.

Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops worldwide, to be conducted October 5-19, 2014, and you have been invited to participate! The Vatican announcement of the impending Synod includes a questionnaire, consisting of 39 brief essay topics relating to the ‘family’ in today’s world, directed to the faithful so that each person may express his and her feelings relating to the ‘rules of the Church,’ and where there is a difference, ‘actual practices’ of the faithful in day-to-day family life. All responses are to be collated by the bishops and submitted to the Vatican, to serve as the basis for the Lineamenta to be considered at the Synod. In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the 39 topics have been translated into a mostly ‘multiple-choice’ series of topics covering the same questions as the questionnaire, but making the process of completing the survey considerably easier. The Archdiocesan survey was to be completed by December 31, 2013 to allow time for compilation of results to be forwarded to the Synod office in Rome. If, for some reason, you didn’t submit your thoughts by the deadline, there may still be an opportunity for you to be heard. Although there is no ‘official’ recovery plan, you are urged to complete the survey in the original Vatican format and submit your thoughts directly to the Vatican. The hyperlink for the Vatican questionnaire is www.scribd.com/doc/180575701, scroll to ‘III. Questions’ and you will find 9 groupings comprising the 39 topics. Submit your responses by the end of January to synodus@synod.va. Incidentally, there will be an Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops worldwide in 2015 to act on the findings of the 2014 Synod.

But why bother?

Well, you may be the person who laments, “Why doesn’t the Church/Bishop ever ask my opinion on birth control, divorce and other important family issues?” Here’s your chance not to just complain to Msgr. Norm or Bishop Clark. You are being given the opportunity to talk to the top man, the CEO of the ‘company’… and you don’t have to give your name! Pope Francis is indicating clearly that he really wants to hear what Catholics actually believe and are practicing in relation to traditional Church teaching on the family. When this information is gathered, it will be presented to the forthcoming Synod of Bishops. It will then be up to the Synod, and ultimately the Pope, to decide where to go from there. With this unparalleled opportunity, it is important for all Catholics to respond to the Vatican survey on family life.

Pope Francis has demonstrated his openness to discussion of topics that in the past have been on the ‘No Reason to Discuss, That’s the Church Law and It Can’t be Changed’ list. The questionnaire is about family – the sole topic of the October Synod, and your opinion is solicited on a number of the formerly forbidden family topics. He’s obviously out to get a profile of the faithful worldwide related to their actual practices of family life, and not just the Church’s teachings on the subject – he already knows the latter.

Here’s a courageous man, apparently not bound by the frozen dictates of the past, who believes in the Vatican II teaching that the Church is truly the People of God. “The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief” (Lumen Gentium #12). This is known in theological terms as the Sensus Fidelium or Consensus of the Faithful. Who knows, he may even have a Vatican III thought in mind now and then, and what might follow the Synod sessions?

This is important: you should participate. Apologies to Nike, but Just Do It! ◆

“We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we can’t have both.”

- Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis
Are You the Catholic You Want to Be?
- Hortense Bradley -

Recently I was participating in a church meeting and used the term “faith formation.” A parishioner turned to me and asked: “What exactly do you mean by ‘faith formation’?” “It means forming one’s faith,” I said. “O-O-O-O-K,” he persisted, “so what does that mean?”

A discussion of any aspect of a personal relationship with God naturally delves into the realm of deeper meaning. Ecclesial terms need to be explained, especially to the faithful, and in context. Forming one’s faith is absolutely necessary in developing a personally meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. For how can one share the good news about Jesus without knowing Him? The issue of adult faith formation, therefore, has assumed an essential place in the Church’s modern-day mission to evangelize. Toward that end, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated, in Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, we must seek to form individuals who are on fire with a faith in Jesus that is alive, explicit, and fruitful.

In the context of the church community, faith formation refers to the process of developing mature faith, with emphasis on “mature.” Having first learned about the Good News of Jesus Christ, we are moved to weld faith with life and live according to Christian values, while growing in our intimacy with God. We leave kindergarten theology behind and move toward an ever-deepening understanding of God and its effect on our relationship with others.

I came to understand that my own faith life needed renewal. I yearned for a deeper encounter with Christ. I was spiritually hungry. Some remedial Catholicism and faith building was in order. But there were few such opportunities in parish life at the time. I searched with a passion and signed up order. But there were few such opportunities in parish life at the time. I searched with a passion and signed up opportunities in parish life at the time. I searched with a passion and signed up to receive God’s self-revelation? Are we engaged in consuming the Word of God (both in Scriptures and Holy Communion) so that we grow into a more intimate union with God? Are we maturing in our faith? Are we hearing and seeing God through seemingly random encounters with persons whose paths we may cross on any given day? Do we ever stop and ponder what real meaning Christ has in our lives? Are we aware of God’s presence in our world and in our lives? All human beings yearn for wholeness, and we believers are blessed with the gift of faith. But are we nurturing it? Are we sharing it with others? Are we evangelizing others through the way we live out our faith every day?

And so, are you and I as Catholics actively seeking, listening for, and open to receiving God’s self-revelation? Are we engaged in consuming the Word of God (both in Scriptures and Holy Communion) so that we grow into a more intimate union with God? Are we maturing in our faith? Are we hearing and seeing God through seemingly random encounters with persons whose paths we may cross on any given day? Do we ever stop and ponder what real meaning Christ has in our lives? Are we aware of God’s presence in our world and in our lives? All human beings yearn for wholeness, and we believers are blessed with the gift of faith. But are we nurturing it? Are we sharing it with others? Are we evangelizing others through the way we live out our faith every day?

Church documents call our attention to two terms that are prominent in the Church’s current vision of mission: evangelization and catechesis. They are foundational to fulfilling the Church’s mission given it by Jesus: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations…” (Mt 28: 19-20). Evangelization refers to the whole of the Church’s efforts to make disciples who believe in the person and message of Jesus the Christ. Catechesis is education in the faith that is formal and transitional, ideally leading to forming one’s faith, while being further transformed interiorly into the likeness of Christ. Our attitude becomes the attitude of Christ (Phil 2:6). A conversion continues to take place. As in baptism, we die to self and are reborn, clothed in Christ, again and again. It is in our daily lives that we struggle to perfect this transformation.

Catechesis is a part of evangelization. It is an essential moment in the process of evangelization, placed firmly within the Church’s mission. Pope Paul VI set the direction for rooting catechesis in the evangelization process following the insight of Vatican II. Recent Church documents emphasize adult formation, catechesis and evangelization, especially the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, which calls for parishes that are “alive in faith and adults who actively cultivate a baptismal and eucharist spirituality with a powerful sense of mission.”

So, first there is the call to evangelize those not yet initiated in the Christian faith; and then there is the New Evangelization, which addresses the hosts of undercatechized Catholics. This last beckons the rest of the faithful to a new awareness of faith. The way we live our lives as Christians---in the workplace, at home, or at play---is a way to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Finally, faith formation is a lifelong process, with adult faith formation receiving top priority. This comes from the recognition that adults are all at different levels of faith. Some have never been instructed in the faith, while others manifest deep faith, and still others have left the practice of the faith. This broad spectrum of faith status is the greatest challenge of adult faith formation, meeting the needs of the faithful and the unchurched wherever they may be in their faith journey.

In the hope of deepening our parishioners’ faith experience, St. Jerome now offers many opportunities for adult faith formation, such as: The Good News People Program; annual Advent and Lenten Events; Catholicism 101 presentations; Bible Study, JustFaith workshops; church missions; a new structure of parish governance using “commissions” to broaden parishioner participation in identifying and dealing with the pastoral needs in our parish community; a dynamic Evangelization Committee that constantly explores ways to effectively evangelize within and outside our parish community.

The opportunities are there. It only remains for more of us to take advantage of these faith-forming events.
The Role of the Government

- Tom Lenert -

When we ponder the behavior of our lawmakers at this moment in history we know that something has gone awry. We believe that our form of government is the best that humanity can offer, and yet we instinctively know that things are far from what they should be. This may not come as a surprise because we know that there will always be a difference between what should be and what is. Or, to put in Christian terms, we accept the fact that we are all sinners and fall short of what Jesus has taught us to be. Nonetheless, in spite of our human limitations, we are not to simply kick back and accept the ‘not yet’ aspect of the Kingdom. We are called as his disciples to go out into the marketplace and work to build the Kingdom that God wants for us.

You may recall a front page article published in the 2012 July-August issue of the Voice in the Wilderness, which explained the rationale of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) as a ‘free-market, limited-government’ approach to fiscal issues. Inroads are made at every turn to undermine the public sphere and replace it with private initiative.

If we want to know what this has to do with Catholic Social Teaching (CST), we must understand how the Church asks us to apply the gospel to what is going on in the world around us. We can’t live in a spiritual vacuum isolated from the cruel social realities of life. We must read ‘the signs of the times’ in the light of Jesus’ teaching. Such realities as government dysfunction, unemployment, immigration, difficulties with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, the growing inequality of wealth distribution, climate change are a few of the major ‘signs of the times’ we face today.

At this particular juncture in American history, the issue of the role of government stands out among others as the crux of the problem. The way we look upon what is happening on the political front of our nation depends upon our understanding of the purpose of government. There are those who believe that ‘that government is best that governs the least.’ Without mincing words, this is simply contrary to Church teaching. While CST is found expressed consistently throughout the social encyclicals of the Church, it is succinctly stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). There it says in no uncertain terms that because of man’s social nature, “the good of each individual is necessarily related to the common good” (CCC #1905). This in turn is based upon the intrinsic value of the human person. “By common good is to be understood the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (CCC #1906). “… it is in the political community that its most complete realization is to be found. It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens and intermediate bodies” (CCC # 1910). Taking this principle one step further, the Catechism states, “This (common) good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to ‘provide for the different needs of men’…” (CCC #1911). Because of the interconnectedness of peoples, this need for an international body to provide for the common good of all nations is becoming more evident by the day.

To unpack those statements of principle, an understanding of the common good is essential. Each individual has inherent rights because of his nature as a child of God that must be protected. Taken as individuals, we stand alone, isolated, and in danger of being trampled upon by more powerful individuals. The common good joins us at the hip, as it were, forming the social unit of the human family that assures us safety and protection in the pursuit of our rights. Without this we would be helpless in the face of those seeking power and control over the weaker members of society. While it is true that government can overreach, and sometimes does, nonetheless the role that government has to play in assuring the rights of the common good is a necessary one.

What sometimes is not clearly understood is the balance between the individual and the common good. Obviously we are individuals first and foremost, and as such have certain basic human rights that must be protected at all costs. But without others we could not long survive. This is most apparent in the basic unit of society, the family. We are dependent upon our parents for the gift of life and its maintenance throughout the early years of life. We learn from others as we grow. The church community offers an introduction to a life of faith and schools are sources of social integration that enable us to develop critical minds. So, it should be evident that while each of us is an individual, we are social by nature as well. That social aspect of our nature extends to the whole human family, not just to our local family, community, city, state or nation. Jesus teaches us to embrace all people, including ‘others,’ as the example of the Samaritan so well illustrates. All human beings are valuable members of the human family. Human solidarity is what constitutes humankind.

Are there any reasonable grounds to hope that the common good can once again gain the prominent status as the goal of government, given the negative attitudes on display in civil society today? It does not seem likely with the influence of concentrated wealth pushing their private agenda. For hope to survive, people of good will have to join forces with Good News people to work together to seek common ground in the pursuit of justice. The time has come for people of faith to stand up and be counted. St. James tells us: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained in the world” (Jas 1:27). Translate that in terms of conditions today and you have the answer to the many of the world’s most urgent problems. ◆

Voice in the Wilderness: Get Involved!
with a black mural with seven bigger-than-life-sized figures standing in line waiting for food. The one with a halo is unmistakably that of Jesus standing in solidarity with the other hungry clients. At the end of the Morning Prayer, volunteers are reminded to greet our guests with a smile and to recognize Jesus in the face of each one who passes through the line, in itself a challenge.

We volunteers begin our day by buttering bread, slicing day-old bagels, chopping onions, shredding carrots, and dicing tomatoes for the many vats of salad to go with the stew of the day. It is common to be called from one task to another just to keep the flow of things moving. While we are preparing for the meal and the lines are forming, our guests are greeted by a caged of cheerful, chirping parakeets that stands amid large shade trees. The garden is tastefully designed to offer a welcoming and hospitable atmosphere. As our guests arrive, they form a line and are greeted by a volunteer who offers them a glass of cold water to slake their thirst. On the wall of the adjacent hotel, they see a series of brightly colored mosaics, created by a Catholic worker who now runs his own Catholic Worker Hospitality house outside Guadalajara.

At 9:30 sharp, the door to the kitchen opens and we start serving our guests. We greet them with a warm smile and a hearty welcome. They enjoy a wholesome hot meal. The staple fare varies between one kind or another of beans, black, pinto, black-eyed pea or lentil, often flavored with chicken, pork or beef. Many look forward to the special monthly treat, a stew of pasta with tuna. We are surprised by the number of guests who request the vegetarian stew, which is always available. This is served with freshly chopped salad mixed with a tasty homemade dressing, buttered and unbuttered bread, grilled bagels and much more, depending upon donations and the number of volunteers that have come to help.

It is a true pleasure to serve them. They are so grateful. An oft-repeated phrase is “Thank you. You have made my day.” However, we do see guests who must have had violent encounters, judging by their battered faces. It touches you in a special way to see the number of women who have been obviously abused. But they are courageous acknowledging our greetings with a sincere ‘thank you.’ The ones who are sick or having a bad day usually respond with a timid smile after the second or third time through the line. That smile is reward enough to be there for them.

With their full plates, they go to the eating area which is furnished with sturdy fixed picnic tables and benches where the guests can sit and eat in peace. Volunteers are always ready to clean the tables as one leaves so the next guest has a clean and inviting spot to eat. Any spills are cleaned up as they happen. This offers the volunteers an opportunity to interact and chat with our guests. Seldom do they find a listening ear of a non-judgmental person.

Veterans, of whom there are many, are eager to tell of their heroic experiences during their years of service, especially of their lost comrades. Many feel left out and find adjusting to civilian life difficult. And, of course, there are the many addicts who feel totally rejected and find it hard to get the support they need to overcome their addictions. Others just long to return to their families but are frustrated in their inability to so. They are desperately looking for advice and answers. Generally they are very...

The Voice in the Wilderness calls us to awaken to our precious heritage and rise up in defense of the Common Good of humankind.◆

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Haven for the Homeless
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with aristocratic French family, traveled extensively across what was then a much smaller America. He carefully recorded his observations for posterity in a book, *Democracy in America*, which is to this day considered a classic analysis of the American experiment in democracy. In it, he postulated that ‘equality of conditions’ more than any other feature stood behind the success of democracy in this fledgling nation. This was something alien to his native France where aristocracy remained deeply entrenched in spite of the French revolution. He worried what would happen to this admirable country were inequality of conditions to prevail. He was equally impressed by the level of political education among the American citizenry. The presence of a multiplicity of newspapers provided abundant information for avid readers to discuss.

But what does this emphasis upon democracy have to do with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST began as a body of systematic thought at the end of the 19th century when social conditions of the working classes had deteriorated to inhumane levels. Pope Leo XIII published the first social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891 in which he defended the rights of workers worldwide. This groundbreaking encyclical was followed by a series of social encyclicals by popes that continue up until our present Pope Francis. They take the underlying biblical message of the prophets and the gospels and apply it to the demands for justice in our day. As Catholics, we must become advocates of CST at a time when, like none other in the modern era, religion is being pushed to the margins and treated as irrelevant and meaningless. The Voice in the Wilderness calls us to awaken to our precious heritage and rise up in defense of the Common Good of humankind.◆
A Testimony

- Brother Curtis (Marcus)

Silas Helms III

Ever since Pope Francis has taken over at the helm of the barque of Peter, he has emphasized that we must show the grace of love to all that we encounter. My spiritual journey from a Pentecostal baptism through rational deism to now worshipping within the Roman Catholic Rite is a concrete example of how Christ’s never diminishing love is at work today through his church. In my instance, God utilized my quest for knowledge concerning the sciences to direct me toward the Roman Catholic Church to complete this quest. Initially, I had doubts regarding the church. I had heard so many negative pronouncements regarding her from Christian and non-believer alike. I had become convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was the enemy of progress and civilization. Clearly, I thought, Jesus Christ would never desire my participation in such a malicious organization. God would, over time, need to prepare my heart to become receptive to his evangelization.

My study of recent advances in the physical sciences had thoroughly convinced my rational mind of God’s creative and sustaining power throughout our universe. Therefore, I realized the need to conform my life to the unmistakable truth of his love for me. As a result of God’s call, I subsequently became a member of a Christian denomination that I believed preached Christ’s Gospel and was compatible with the forward march of Western Civilization. Clearly, at that time, I thought that the Roman Catholic Church did not meet these criteria. The denomination I joined made a point of emphasizing that their church was part of the apostolic succession. Also, a large percentage of its members were former Roman Catholics. These facts sparked my interest to learn more about the Roman Catholic Church itself.

The Internet can serve as a great teacher or deceiver depending on where one looks. Clearly, Jesus must have had me search in the right places, because as a result of my on-line research, I became convinced that Roman Catholic Church was truly the place where I should reside within the Body of Christ. I learned about the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and the other fifteen documents of the Second Vatican Council. As I studied their content, I was amazed at the knowledge and sophistication these writings displayed regarding the state of humanity’s relationship to the transcendent.

One day, circumstances had made it possible for me to attend a Sunday 11AM mass at Saint Jerome Parish. This mass happened around the time the new Roman Missal had been presented to the church. In spite of the unfamiliarity with the new text that was obvious to the parishioners, God still touched my heart by the majesty of what I witnessed during that mass. Because of the spiritual beauty of what I saw and felt, I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to participate in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) at Saint Jerome.

The RCIA process is absolutely essential to ground a candidate in the foundations of Catholicism. Many misconceptions and errors that had been present in my faith understanding were corrected. The criticality of the Eucharist within the Christian experience was repeatedly emphasized. This aspect of the Roman Rite is most important, because the Roman Catholic Church is the one Church where the full efficacy of the Eucharist is beyond dispute. The desire to partake fully in the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ is what kept me in the RCIA, despite the many attempts of Satan to dissuade me from completing the process.

By the grace of God, on the ninth day of December in the Year of our Lord 2012, I received the Sacrament of Confirmation at Saint Jerome Parish. Since that day Jesus Christ has worked miracles of grace in my life. I have dedicated myself to become a vessel of God’s love to all, both inside and outside the Body of Christ. Through the Church, God had presented me with numerous opportunities to strengthen my Christian faith. It is truly amazing the spiritual resources that the Church has, through the millennia, allowed the faithful to grow closer to God. Consider just this short list of resources the Church has made available to its body: doctrinal fidelity via the Magisterium, prayer guidance via the Christian Prayer Liturgy, life intercessions via the Saints, devotional scriptures via the accurate Bible translations, knowledge acquisition via religious orders like the Society of Jesus, and pastoral guidance via the Holy Order offices of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon. As one who is growing in the Catholic faith, I am actively utilizing all of the aforementioned sacred resources, in love, to grow closer to our savior Jesus Christ. I am certain my life in the Body of Christ can only become closer to God over the future days, months, and years.

In summary, to quote Pope Francis from Evangelii Gaudium, “When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment” (10). Also, he adds “A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the lukewarm and the non-practicing, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization” (11). My intention is to take these exhortations to heart and live my Christian life henceforth in the spirit of continual evangelization. Deo Gratias. Amen.

Haven for the Homeless

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lonely, living with a sense of abandonment.

All this under big shady trees with a fountain stocked with coi fish. They hear the soothing sound of a rippling water fountain and see vases with flowers adorning the tables. Some of our guests pick this area to meditate or just to be alone in a quiet and safe environment. Often they take a short nap. Ultimately, they find the Catholic Workers Hospitality Kitchen a true haven of comfort and safety.

I often tell myself how blessed I am to volunteer in such a beautiful place to make these children of God feel more loved. It certainly enriches the soul.
Environmental Corner: Whatever is the TPP?

- Jacqueline Welsh -

It seems as if much of the public and media are ignorant of what the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is all about. But we now know that it was intended to keep everyone in the dark about its purpose, even members of Congress. In the past four years, 600 corporations, such as Monsanto, DuPont, Wal-mart, Big Oil, Big Pharma and other corporate lobbyists have been secretly trying to pass a trade agreement, using the Obama administration as their tool. These corporate advisors were given full access of the details of this proposal. Why were they privy to this knowledge, yet the American people were not??

The reason now seems pretty clear. The TPP undermines our domestic laws, allowing these corporations to play havoc with the environment. We have laws that regulate corporations from polluting wherever they want and hold them accountable for the damage they do, though it is getting harder and harder to enforce these laws. TPP would allow these corporations to make their own rules, which would strip governments of the power to regulate transnational corporate activities (localfoodshift.com).

TPP would mean less locally produced foods, since this pact would block any kind of ban on the use of Genetically Modified Organisms. Fracking would continue without the people having a say. Questionable seafood would continue to be imported unabated. Basically it would entail more corporate control of our democracy (www.foodandwaterwatch.org). In fact, it is now clear that TPP is nothing more than a “power grab by transnational corporations” (Billmoyers.com). “Control food and you control the people” Henry Kissinger, (1970). “No food shall be grown that we don’t own.” Monsanto.

The American people are also getting a glimpse of what TPP is all about thanks to the exposés of Bill Moyer, Rachel Maddow, NPR and others. As a result, actions were held in a dozen cities across the country revealing the true contents of TPP. Wisconsin just passed two resolutions opposing this pact while other local governments are doing the same. Why is there such opposition if, as the supporters of TPP say, this deal is about pursuing more free trade? Let me explain.

In a true free trade context, everyone among representatives of different regulatory agencies and consumer groups is brought to the table to discuss and agree in a consensual manner the best way to guarantee consumer safety. For example, why not encourage using the free trade agreement to bring the price of drugs in the U. S. down to the levels seen in other democratic nations? The U.S. drug companies are also trying to manipulate the rules to increase the strength of patent and related protections, which would make it harder to monitor, regulate and prosecute these companies if they are guilty of any wrongdoing. (www.organicconsumers.org)

The people instinctively know that to allow such global trade agreements, corporations need to act democratically, for the good of the people, not for their own financial gain. That is not what’s happening here.

I can’t help but think of the words of Pope Francis when he says, “Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized...”

What’s really scary is that, if this pact succeeds, “the TPP will be left open for any country to join, meaning allowing the TPP to move forward, whereas no other trade agreement would ever be negotiated again, instead countries could be added to TPP” (Mitch Jones, Common Resource Program Director). According to the website https://en.avaaz.org/760/tpp-secret-talks-free-trade-agreement, The TPP would permanently enshrine the very economic system that has led to greater imbalances in income and wealth and increasing economic crises.

TPP is clearly an example of the use of economic power to foist unscrutinized laws on the people of this country, and on other poorer countries, just to facilitate the goals of the mega-corporations, or as Pope Francis states, “To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish idea, a globalization of indifference has developed.”

As Christians we have the obligation to insist that trade be fair, just and sustainable. We can do this by spreading the word on TPP or exposing the leaked TPP text in the citizen media. Once word gets around, the corporate media will have no choice but to unite with those in their quest to put the welfare of the people of the planet over their need for profit and control of private corporations. We must heed the words, Pope Francis who is insistently saying to all his followers, “money must serve, not rule!” It would behoove our government leaders to listen to his words.

So, if you haven’t done it already, please email, call or tweet your Member of Congress and tell him/her to vote no on TPP. ◆

“The arc of the moral universe bends toward justice!”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.