

Ten After Ten Session 117: Justice and Solidarity Among Nations

2437 On the international level, inequality of resources and economic capability is such that it creates a real “gap” between nations. On the one side there are those nations possessing and developing the means of growth and, on the other, those accumulating debts.

2438 Various causes of a religious, political, economic, and financial nature today give “the social question a worldwide dimension.” There must be solidarity among nations which are already politically interdependent. . . In place of abusive if not usurious financial systems, iniquitous commercial relations among nations, and the arms race, there must be substituted a common effort to mobilize resources toward objectives of moral, cultural, and economic development, “redefining the priorities and hierarchies of values.”

2439 Rich nations have a grave moral responsibility toward those which are unable to ensure the means of their development by themselves or have been prevented from doing so by tragic historical events. It is a duty in solidarity and charity; it is also an obligation in justice if the prosperity of the rich nations has come from resources that have not been paid for fairly.

2440 Direct aid is an appropriate response to immediate, extraordinary needs caused by natural catastrophes, epidemics, and the like. But it does not suffice to repair the grave damage resulting from destitution or to provide a lasting solution to a country’s needs. It is also necessary to reform international economic and financial institutions so that they will better promote equitable relationships with less advanced countries.

2441 An increased sense of God and increased self-awareness are fundamental to any full development of human society. This development multiplies material goods and puts them at the service of the person and his freedom. It reduces dire poverty and economic exploitation. It makes for growth in respect for cultural identities and openness to the transcendent.

2442 It is not the role of the Pastors of the Church to intervene directly in the political structuring and organization of social life. This task is part of the vocation of the lay faithful, acting on their own initiative with their fellow citizens. Social action can assume various concrete forms. It should always have the common good in view and be in conformity with the message of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. It is the role of the laity to animate temporal realities with Christian commitment, by which they show that they are witnesses and agents of peace and justice.

2443 God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them. . . It is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones. When “the poor have the good news preached to them,” it is the sign of Christ’s presence.

2444 The Church’s love for the poor. . . is a part of her constant tradition. This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. Love for the poor is even one of the motives for the duty of working so as to “be able to give to those in need.” It extends not only to material poverty but also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty.

2445 Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use.

2446 St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls this: “Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.” The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity.

2447 The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.

2448 Human misery is the obvious sign of the inherited condition of frailty and need for salvation in which man finds himself as a consequence of original sin... Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere.

2449 Jesus makes these words his own: “The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.” In so doing he does not soften the vehemence of former oracles...but invites us to recognize his own presence in the poor who are his brethren.

When her mother reproached her for caring for the poor and the sick at home, St. Rose of Lima said to her: When we serve the poor and the sick, we serve Jesus. We must not fail to help our neighbors, because in them we serve Jesus.