

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

JOSEPHITE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING SERIES. AUGUST 18, 2026

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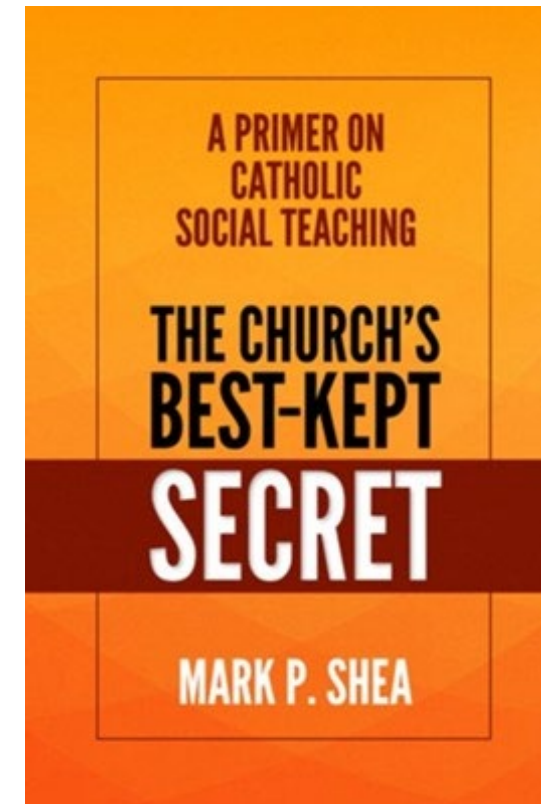
Key Questions

- ▶ How do Catholics approach social justice questions and issues?
- ▶ If we profess to be Christians – believers in the God revealed by Jesus Christ – then how ought we to live in society?
- ▶ “How ought we to live together,” inspired by faith – and not personal or partisan political interests? (Pope JP2)



What Is Catholic Social Teaching?

A body of official teaching – also called “the social doctrine of the Church” – developed by the leaders of the church (popes and bishops) that applies the insights of the Bible and the convictions of Christian faith to the social, political, and economic conditions of people today.



A Developing Tradition

Catholic Social Teaching is a long tradition, over 135 years old, with evolving insights and new perspectives as social life develops and changes.

THE FAITHJUSTICE CENTENNIAL

The Roots of Faithjustice

1891	Rerum Novarum (Leo XIII)
1931	Quadragesimo Anno (Pius IX)
1961	Mater et Magistra (John XXIII)
1963	Pacem in Terris (John XXIII)
1965	CHURCH/MODERN WORLD (Vatican II)
1967	Populorum Progressio (Paul VI)
1971	Octogesima Adveniens (Paul VI)
1971	JUSTICE IN THE WORLD (Synod II)
1975	Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI)
1981	Laborem Exercens (John Paul II)
1983	CHALLENGE OF PEACE (National Conference of Catholic Bishops)
1986	ECONOMIC JUSTICE (National Conference of Catholic Bishops)
1987	Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (John Paul II)
1991	Centesimus Annus
2004	COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH (PONT. COUNCIL JUSTICE AND PEACE)
2009	CARITAS IN VERITATE (BENEDICT XVI)

A Developing Tradition: Popes Francis and Leo XIV



- ▶ **Evangelii Gaudium (2013):** on the joy of the gospel; his manifesto for Christian renewal
- ▶ **Laudato Si (2015):** on the care of our common home as a justice issue
- ▶ **Gaudete et Exsultate (2018):** on the dignity of all human life
- ▶ **Fratelli Tutti (2020):** on social friendship, in light of the Covid pandemic; greater solidarity
- ▶ **Laudate Deum (2023):** the urgency of the climate crisis
- ▶ **Magnifica Humanitas (2026):** the 135th anniversary of **Rerum Novarum**; the challenge of artificial intelligence and an apology for Catholic support for slavery

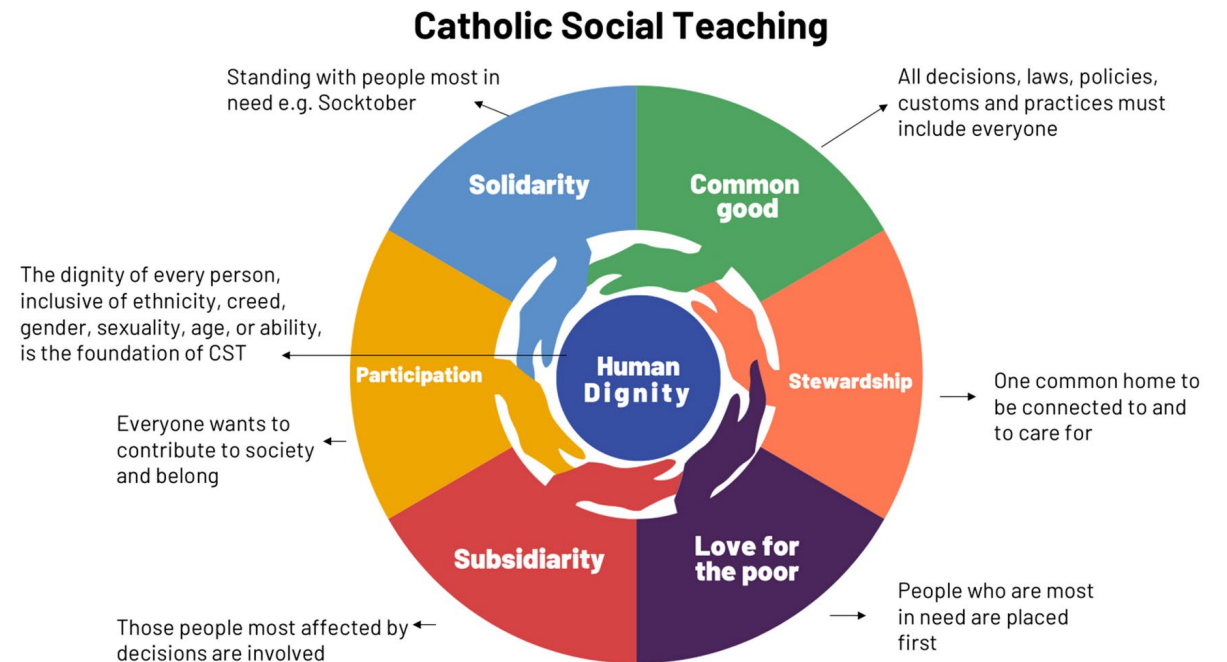
The Call and Vision

“The pursuit of justice and peace is an essential part of what makes a parish Catholic. . . . **Our faith is profoundly social. We cannot be called truly ‘Catholic’ unless we hear and heed the Church’s call to serve those in need and work for justice and peace.**”

--U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Communities of Salt and Light*, 1992

CST: Major Themes

- ▶ **Life and Dignity of the Human Person**
- ▶ Call to Family, Community and Participation
- ▶ Rights and Responsibilities
- ▶ Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- ▶ The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- ▶ Solidarity
- ▶ Care for God's Creation



CST: Core Convictions & Values

- ▶ The Fundamental and Equal Dignity of Every Human Person
- ▶ The Promotion and Defense of Basic Human Rights
- ▶ A Vision of Social Life: “Common Good” and “Solidarity” as Markers of a Just Society
- ▶ A Special Concern for the Least among Us, especially the Poor and the Vulnerable
- ▶ Care for the Earth: “Our Common Home”

Human Dignity

THE FOUNDATION FOR
CATHOLIC ENGAGEMENT
WITH SOCIAL LIFE:

THE HUMAN BEING AS
IMAGO DEI

(CREATED IN THE IMAGE
OF GOD: *GENESIS 1:28*)

The Dignity of the Human Person

- ▶ The **sacred, intrinsic, equal** and **inviolable** dignity of every human person – as the visible image of the invisible God – is **absolute and fundamental** to Catholic social teaching and action.
- ▶ “The basis for all that the Church believes about the moral dimensions of economic life is its vision of the transcendent worth—the sacredness—of human beings. **The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured.**” (*Economic Justice for All*, #28)
- ▶ Independent of any human accomplishment and achievement, regardless of conduct, class, geography, gender, race, or any other human status

Dignity Stems from Our Creation



Humans made
in the *image*
of God

(Genesis 1:26)

Verse
by
Verse

THE SIGNIFICANCE

Genesis 1:26 shows that humans are uniquely made in the image of God, meaning we reflect aspects of His character—like reason, morality, creativity, and the ability to relate. This gives every person inherent value, dignity, and purpose.

The verse also teaches that we are given dominion over creation, meaning we are to steward the earth responsibly. The phrase “Let us make man” hints at God’s relational nature, possibly pointing to the Trinity.

In ethics and relationships, this verse calls us to treat all people with equality and respect, live with moral responsibility, care for creation, and reflect God’s character in how we love, lead, and serve.

Dignity of the Human Person = “Holy”



- ▶ “When we deal with each other, we should do so with the sense of awe that arises in the presence of **something holy and sacred**. For that is what human beings are: we are created in the image of God (Gn 1:27).”

▶ *Economic Justice for All, #28*

Human Dignity

- ▶ We don't "give" people dignity, value, and worth; **already given by God.**
- ▶ **It cannot be surrendered, lost, or erased. By anyone.** It is there by God's will.
- ▶ "At the summit of creation stands the creation of man and woman, made in God's image (Gn 1:26-27). **As such every human being possesses an inalienable dignity that stamps human existence prior to any division into races or nations and prior to human labor and human achievement (Gn 4- 11).**" (*Economic Justice for All*, #32)
- ▶ The proper human response: to recognize, promote, and defend this already given dignity so that **all** may come to enjoy the fullness of life that God intends.

Dignity Yields a Basic Principle

- ▶ “Every social, political, and economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.” (*Economic Justice for All*)

- ▶ Three Questions:

- 1) What does it do **to** people?
- 2) What does it do **for** people?
- 3) What does it enable people **to do for themselves?**

People, not issues, are central and sacred!

ALL Lives Matter

“Todos, Todos, Todos!” (Pope Francis)

- ▶ Women's lives matter
- ▶ Unborn lives matter
- ▶ Imprisoned lives matter
- ▶ Immigrant lives matter
- ▶ Poor lives matter
- ▶ Disabled lives matter
- ▶ Muslim lives matter
- ▶ Gay/lesbian/trans lives matter
- ▶ Blue lives matter
- ▶ **Black lives matter**

**YES, ALL LIVES
MATTER**
BUT WE'RE FOCUSED ON THE
BLACK ONES RIGHT NOW, OK?
— BECAUSE IT IS VERY —
APPARENT
THAT OUR JUDICIAL SYSTEM
DOESN'T KNOW THAT.
PLUS, IF YOU CAN'T SEE WHY WE'RE EXCLAIMING
#BLACKLIVESMATTER
YOU ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM.

Catholics and political beliefs



- **59% of white Catholics voted for Trump's re-election in 2024** (compared to 57% in 2020 and 54% in 2016)

Life and Human Dignity in Action

“All” means All
(easy in the
abstract)

BEING “PRO-LIFE”: RACISM IS A
LIFE ISSUE

POPE FRANCIS IN AMERICA:
THE IMMIGRANT, THE
HOMELESS, AND THE
IMPRISONED

POPE LEO AND THE IRAN WAR

Authentically Catholic and Being “Pro-Life”



CONGREGATIO
PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI

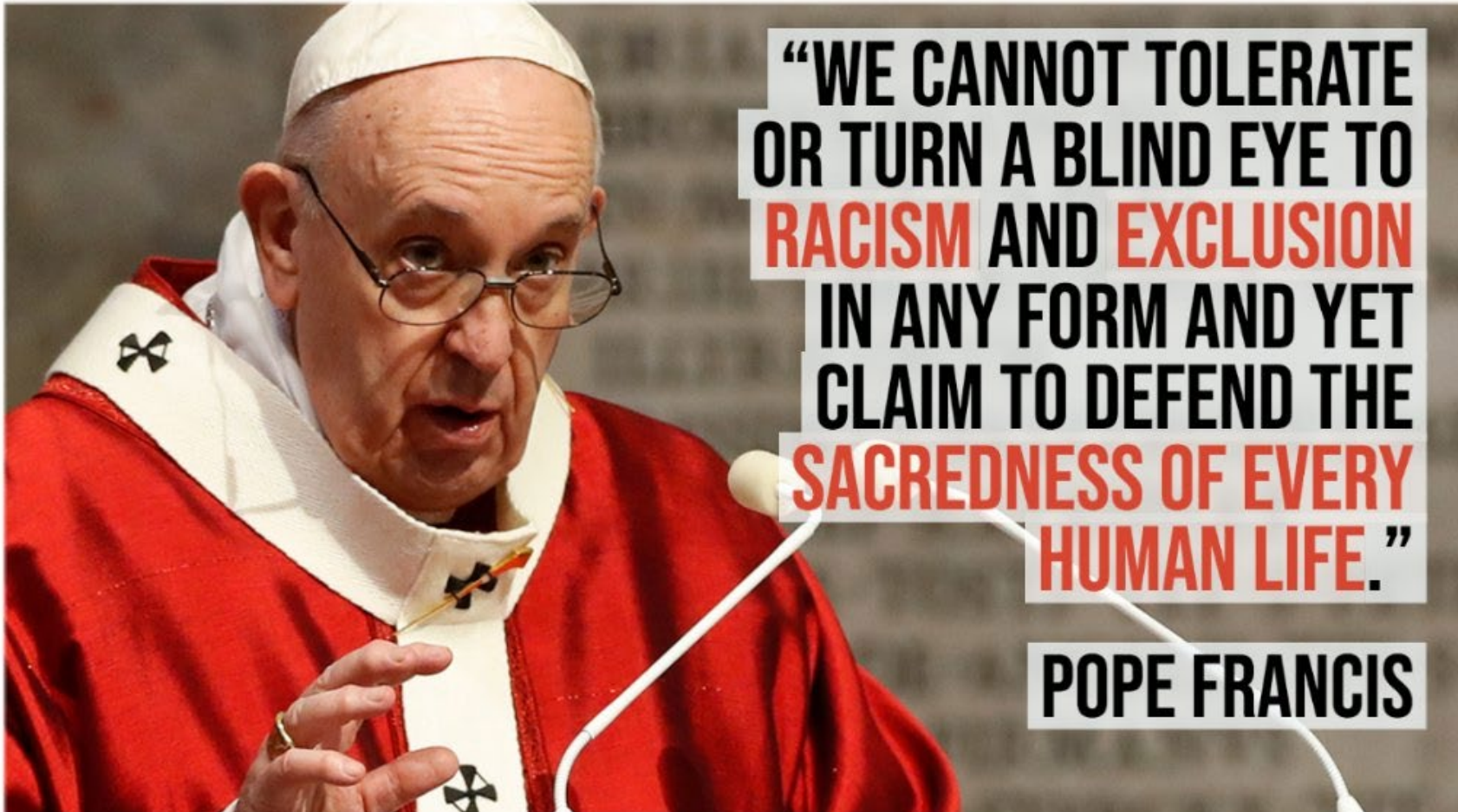
- ▶ ***Declaration on Procured Abortion (1974)***
- ▶ Catholics must oppose **both** the *practice* of abortion **and** “the social conditions that make it attractive.”
- ▶ “**must give every child coming into this world a welcome worthy of a person.**”
- ▶ Pro-life means concern for the child **after** birth as well as before.

St. Pope John Paul II: “Unconditionally Pro-Life”



- ▶ “Unconditionally pro-life” means standing against “euthanasia, the death penalty, and racism”
- ▶ “. . . **To eradicate every form of racism**, a plague which is one of the most persistent and destructive evils of the nation.” (1999)
- ▶ Pro-life has never meant a concern for only one issue

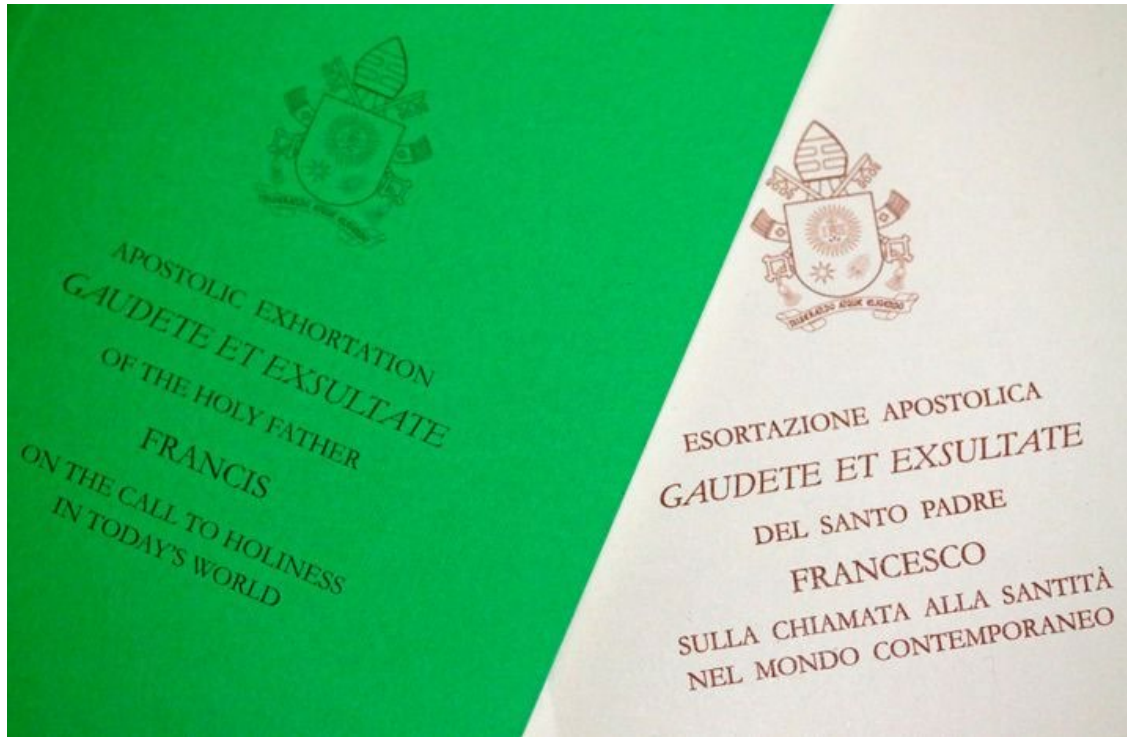
Pope Francis: Racism is a Life Issue



**“WE CANNOT TOLERATE
OR TURN A BLIND EYE TO
RACISM AND EXCLUSION
IN ANY FORM AND YET
CLAIM TO DEFEND THE
SACREDNESS OF EVERY
HUMAN LIFE.”**

POPE FRANCIS

The lives of the Unborn and Those Already Born Are “Equally Sacred”



- “Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate,” Francis wrote in his exhortation. “**Equally sacred**, however, are the lives of the poor, **those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged**, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.” (*Guadete et Exsultate*, 2018)

Pope Leo XIV

Again, a pro-life society is not concerned about only one issue, but about the sacred value of **ALL** lives, especially those most despised.

This includes Haitian immigrants!

“

Someone who says, 'I'm against abortion,' but is in favor of the death penalty is not really pro-life. Someone who says, 'I'm against abortion but I'm in agreement with the **inhuman treatment of immigrants in the United States,**' I don't know if that's pro-life.

Pope Leo XIV



Let's Talk about Being “Pro-Life”



- ▶ I love unborn lives. Particularly Black unborn lives.
- ▶ I love them too much to stop caring for them once they are born!
- ▶ **I want unborn Black children to live in a world where they eat nutritious food. Breathe fresh air. Drink clean water. Have quality education. Live in safe neighborhoods. Where they can live without fear.** Where they can sit in a park, go jogging, sleep in their homes and not be killed. And be blamed for their deaths.
- ▶ That's being **“unconditionally pro-life”** (St. Pope John Paul II)

Pope Francis (2015)



Challenge to America: What Makes America “Great”?



“A nation can be considered great when it defends liberty as **Lincoln** did, when it fosters a culture which enables people to “dream” of full rights for all their brothers and sisters, as **Martin Luther King** sought to do; when it strives for justice and the cause of the oppressed, as **Dorothy Day** did by her tireless work, the fruit of a faith which becomes dialogue and sows peace in the contemplative style of **Thomas Merton**.”

Address to the Homeless Poor, NYC



- ▶ I want to be very clear. **There is no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing.** There are many unjust situations, but we know that God is suffering with us, experiencing them at our side. He does not abandon us.
- ▶ **Jesus not only wanted to show solidarity with every person. He not only wanted everyone to experience his companionship, his help, his love.** He identified with all those who suffer, who weep, who suffer any kind of injustice. **He says this clearly: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).**

“Encounter with the Immigrant”



I take this opportunity to thank all those, of whatever religion, who have sought to serve God, the God of peace, by building cities of brotherly love, by caring for our neighbors in need, by defending the dignity of God's gift, the gift of life in all its stages, and by defending the cause of the poor and the immigrant. **All too often, those most in need of our help, everywhere, are unable to be heard. You are their voice, and many of you – men and women – have faithfully made their cry heard.** In this witness, **which frequently encounters powerful resistance**, you remind American democracy of the ideals for which it was founded, and that society is weakened whenever and wherever injustice prevails.

Philadelphia Correctional Facility



I am here as a pastor, but above all as a brother, to share your situation and to make it my own. . . . **It is painful when we see prison systems which are not concerned to care for wounds, to soothe pain, to offer new possibilities.** It is painful when we see people who think that only others need to be cleansed, purified, and do not recognize that their weariness, pain and wounds are also the weariness, pain and wounds of society. The Lord tells us this clearly with a sign: **he washes our feet so we can come back to the table. The table from which he wishes no one to be excluded. The table which is spread for all and to which all of us are invited.**

Human Dignity and the Iran War



“Pope Leo is terrible . . . soft on crime.”



Catholic Social Teaching is not “Woke” but “Moral”

Our belief in the equal dignity of every human person is a faith conviction, independent of our politics. **It is a Gospel conviction, rooted in a 2,000 year faith tradition.**

The problem in the US is that people see their politics as primary over their faith!



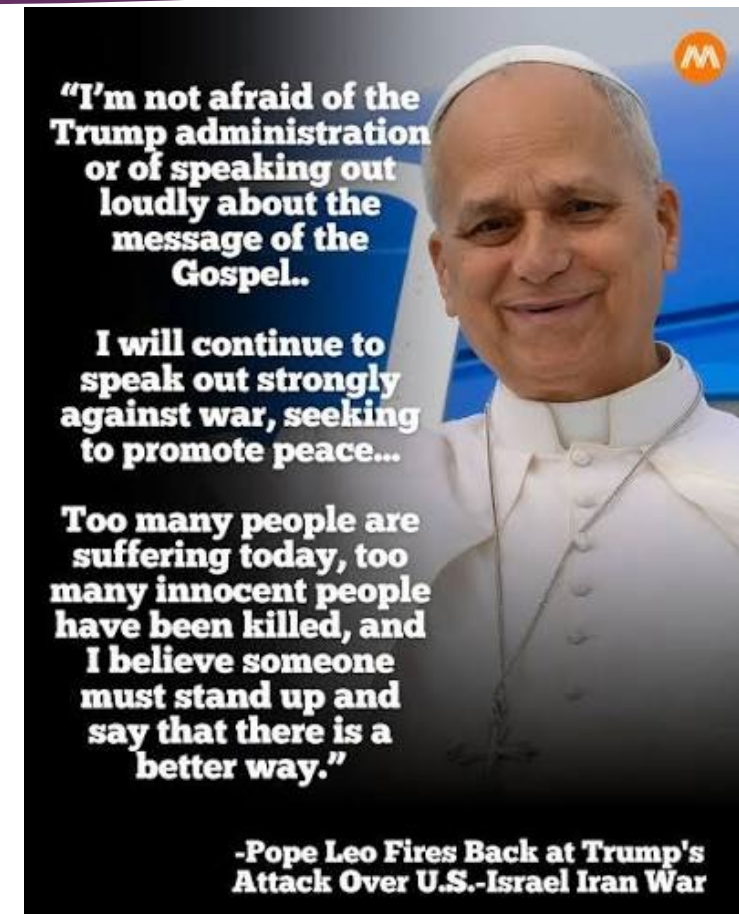
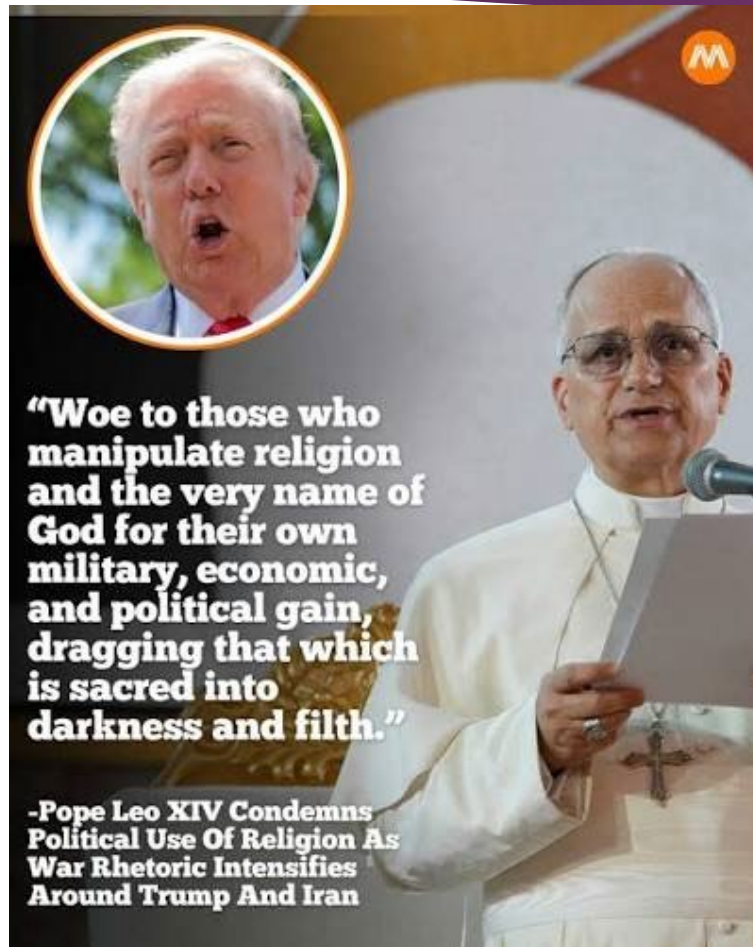
“I am not a politician. I have no intention to debate with (Trump). The message is the same: to promote peace.”

Pope Leo XIV

After the US president criticised him over his comments on the US-Iran war.

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CST and the Pope: Moral, not Partisan



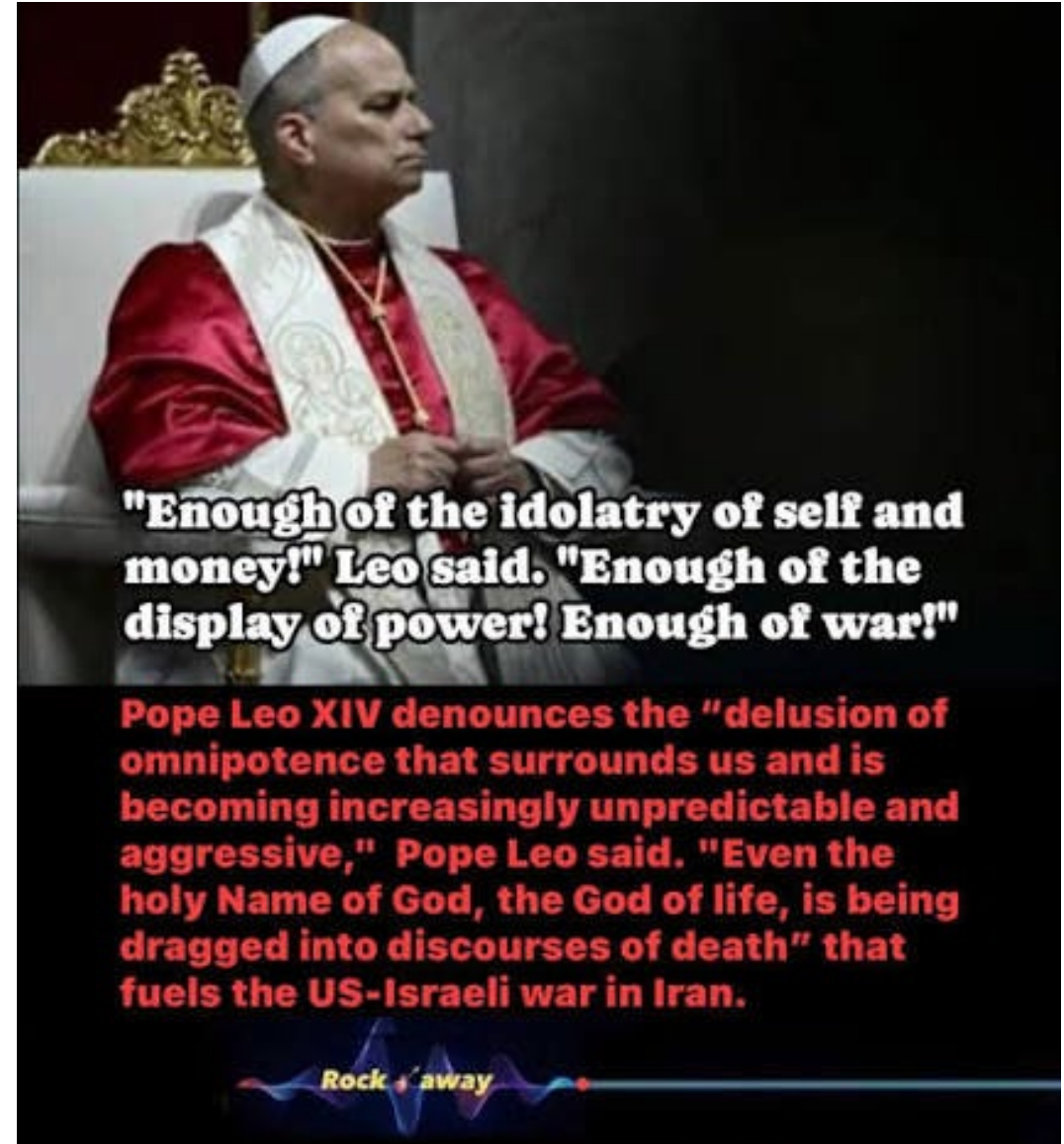
Life and Dignity of the Human Person

*Easy to understand in
theory!*

A prophetic principle for
both society and the
Church

Who counts as “human”?

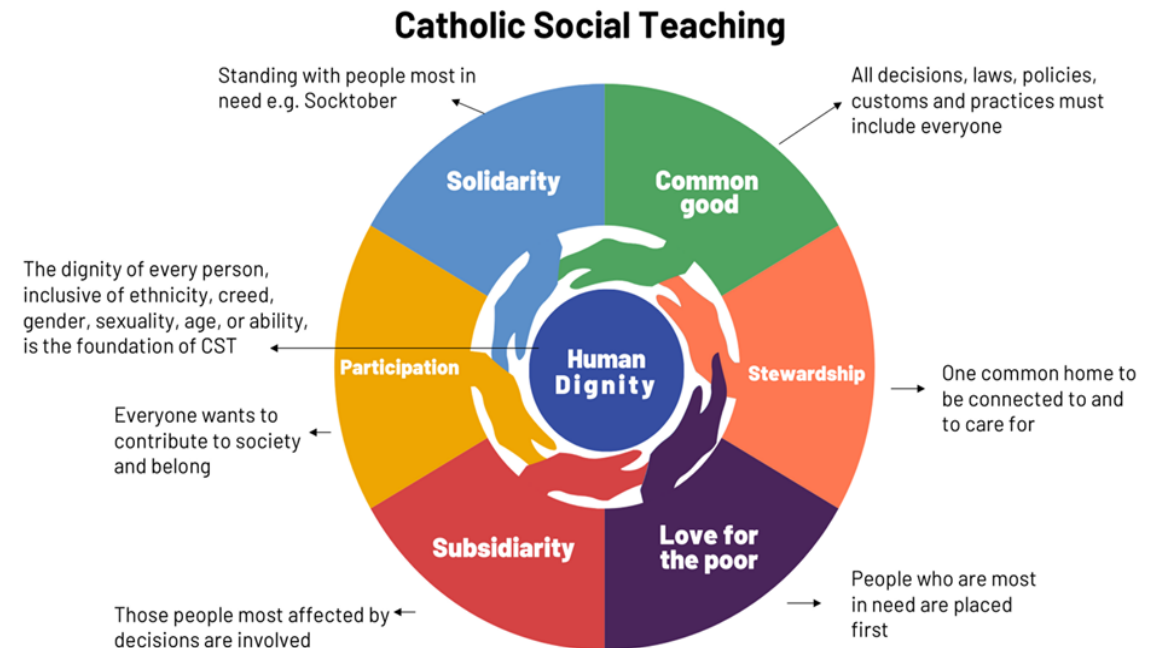
“**All**” means **ALL**! No small
print; no exclusions.



Human Dignity is Central and the Foundation

The following weeks will show how we unpack that conviction.

This faith stance influences everything the Catholic Church says about social issues. And how we are called to live as disciples of Jesus.



Dignity Yields a Basic Principle

- ▶ “Every social, political, and economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.” (*Economic Justice for All*)
- ▶ Three Questions:
 - 1) What does it do **to** people?
 - 2) What does it do **for** people?
 - 3) What does it enable people **to do for themselves?**

For Discussion:

- ▶ What did you hear that affirmed your faith or makes you proud to be Catholic?
- ▶ Why do you think that so many people struggle to accept the equal human dignity, value, and worth of all people?
- ▶ What changes do you think church leaders need to make so that this teaching of Christ and the Church becomes better known?