

FOLLOWING Jesus

You can work for justice simply by treating others as you want to be treated. Show compassion towards everyone you meet, and treat people as children of God. By giving people the dignity and respect they deserve, you will help to ensure justice.



Social encyclicals are letters written by a pope that explain how Christians are to live justly.

WORKING FOR PEACE

Jesus did not give his disciples a detailed list explaining what they should do to live justly. You are already familiar with the core of this teaching as expressed in Matthew 5:3–12 (the Beatitudes) and Matthew 25:31–45 (the Corporal Works of Mercy). Over the centuries, the Church has continued to offer guidance on how to act justly.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In a speech to the United Nations, Pope Paul VI told the world's delegates, "If you want peace, work for justice." The word *justice* is often defined as "giving to someone what he or she is owed." But what does that mean? Can one person justly own all of the land in an area, while the people who work the land own nothing? Do you have a right to have more than enough food to eat, while someone is sitting at your backdoor dying of hunger? The Church would answer each of these questions "no!"

God's creation was meant for the benefit of all, not just for the benefit of a few. For this reason, everyone has the right to participate in the economic life of a community. One person's right to ownership is not greater than another's right to make a living. As Saint John Chrysostom wrote, "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."

Helping people to gain what is rightfully theirs is known as social justice. In the last one hundred years, various popes have written **social encyclicals** which explain in detail how Christians are to act justly today. Above all, Christians are called to do everything they can to help the poor and oppressed people of the world.

PEACEMAKING

Although not always seen in practice, Christianity is a religion of peace. Jesus' teaching was seen as a ban on all forms of violence: "Offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well."

The Church's teaching on war was influenced by Saint Augustine's proposal of the just war theory. This theory said that Christians had the right and the obligation to defend the defenseless and fight evil. This theory still shapes Church teaching, although pacifism—refusing to use violence to resolve conflicts—is also part of the Church's long tradition.

1. **Why is justice an important part of peacemaking?**
2. **What is one way you can be a peacemaker today?**