

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

We believe as Catholics that God is actively at work in our lives and throughout all time. God is at work redeeming humanity and inviting all of us to participate in the work of salvation.

OVERVIEW

God is at work redeeming humanity and inviting all of us to participate in the work of salvation. Understanding that work of redemption and being aware of God's invitation to join in that process are known as "reading the signs of the times."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do we use our faith to change unjust policies and situations in our lives and community?
- How does compassion for others help realize the Kingdom of God on earth? In our families and in our community?
- How do we raise our voice and influence issues in our community and society that harm human life and dignity?

MEDIA RESOURCES FROM THE BISHOP GRADY MEMORIAL LIBRARY

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DVD-0771E	Jesuits on Business Ethics
DVD-0539	Renewal
DVD-0504	Buyer Be Fair
DVD-0538	This Is Your Home
DVD-0470	Keeping the Earth
DVD-0599	Lives for Sale
DVD-0467	My Own Four Walls
DVD-0646	The Human Experience
DVD-050	Break Forth into Joy: Beyond a Consumer Lifestyle
CD-0110	Catholic Social Teaching
DVD-0119	Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey
DVD-0139G	What Are Our Politics? Working for Justice for All
DVD-0172L	Rich
DVD-0325	Endless Exodus, the Sorrowful Flight of the Migrants

SAINTS AND PRAYERS

St Francis of Assisi, Feast day: October 4

St. Francis is the founder of the Franciscan Order and he was born in Assisi, Italy 1181. As he grew up, Francis became the leader of a crowd of young people who spent their nights in wild parties. Thomas of Celano, his biographer who knew him well, said, "In other respects an exquisite youth, he attracted to himself a whole retinue of young people addicted to evil and accustomed to vice." Francis himself said, "I lived in sin" during that time.

Francis' conversion did not happen overnight. God had waited for him for twenty-five years and now it was Francis' turn to wait. Francis started to spend more time in prayer. He went off to a cave and wept for his sins. Sometimes God's grace overwhelmed him with joy. But life couldn't just stop for God. There was a business to run, customers to wait on.

His search for conversion led him to the ancient church at San Damiano. While he was praying there, he heard Christ on the crucifix speak to him, "Francis, repair my church." Francis assumed this meant church with a small c -- the crumbling building he was in. Acting again in his impetuous way, he took fabric from his father's shop and sold it to get money to repair the church. His father saw this as an act of theft -- and put together with Francis' cowardice, waste of money, and his growing disinterest in money made Francis seem more like a madman than his son. Pietro dragged Francis before the bishop and in front of the whole town demanded that Francis return the money and renounce all rights as his heir.

Francis went back to what he considered God's call. He begged for stones and rebuilt the San Damiano church with his own hands, not realizing that it was the Church with a capital C that God wanted repaired. Scandal and avarice were working on the Church from the inside while outside heresies flourished by appealing to those longing for something different or adventurous.

St. Robert Bellarmine (patron saint of canon lawyers) Feast day: September 17

Born at Montepulciano, Italy, October 4, 1542, St. Robert Bellarmine was the third of ten children. His mother, Cinzia Cervini, a niece of Pope Marcellus II, was dedicated to almsgiving, prayer, meditation, fasting, and mortification of the body.

Robert entered the newly formed Society of Jesus in 1560 and after his ordination went on to teach at Louvain (1570-1576) where he became famous for his Latin sermons. In 1576, he was appointed to the chair of controversial theology at the Roman College, becoming Rector in 1592; he went on to become Provincial of Naples in 1594 and Cardinal in 1598. This outstanding scholar and devoted servant of God defended the Apostolic See against the anti-clericals in Venice and against the political tenets of James I of England. He composed an exhaustive apologetic work against the prevailing heretics of his day. In the field of church-state relations, he took a position based on principles now regarded as fundamentally democratic - authority originates with God, but is vested in the people, who entrust it to fit rulers.

This saint was the spiritual father of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, helped St. Francis de Sales obtain formal approval of the Visitation Order, and in his prudence opposed severe action in the case of Galileo. He has left us a host of important writings, including works of devotion and instruction, as well as controversy. He died in 1621.



SAINTS AND PRAYERS

Prayer of Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Peace (Jan. 1, 2002)

"Salve, Madre santa!"

Virgin Daughter of Zion, how deeply must your Mother's heart suffer for this bloodshed!

The child you embrace has a name that is dear to the peoples of biblical religion: "Jesus," which means "God saves." So the Archangel named him before he was conceived in your womb (cf. Lk 2,21). In the face of the newborn Messiah, we recognize the face of all your children, who suffer from being despised and exploited. We recognize especially the faces of your children, to whatever race, nation or culture they may belong.

For them, O Mary, for their future, we ask you to move hearts hardened by hatred so that they may open to love and so that revenge may finally give way to forgiveness.

Obtain for us, O Mother, that the truth of this affirmation -- No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness -- be engraved on every heart. Thus the human family will be able to find the true peace, that flows from the union of justice and mercy.

Holy Mother, Mother of the Prince of Peace, help us!

Mother of Humanity and Queen of Peace, pray for us!

DOCUMENTS AND WEBSITES

USCCB Search for these titles at www.usccb.org.

- The Good Life, from a Catholic Perspective: The Challenge of Consumption
- Go and Make Disciples, A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States (also available in Spanish)

Vatican Documents Search for these titles at www.vatican.va

- Rerum Novarum (On Capital and Labor, foundational text of Catholic Social Teaching) (also available in Spanish)
- Centesimus Annus (On the Hundredth Year of Rerum Novarum, Pope John Paul II) (also available in Spanish)
- On Social Concern (Pope John Paul II) (also available in Spanish)
- Gaudium et Spes (Second Vatican Council) (also available in Spanish)

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: SCRIPT

“The Pharisees and Sadducees came and, to test him, asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He said to them in reply ... You know how to judge the appearance of the sky, but you cannot judge the signs of the times.”

Matthew 16:1-3

We believe as Catholics that God is actively at work in our lives and throughout all time. God is at work redeeming humanity and inviting all of us to participate in the work of salvation. Understanding that work of redemption and being aware of God’s invitation to join in that process are known as “reading the signs of the times.”

“The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.” Gaudium et Spes, Vatican II Document, 1965, #4

In order to read the “signs” in contemporary culture, we need to integrate a process of observing the problems or challenges in society and judging the moral impact in light of the teachings of the Church based on Gospel values and then take the right action.

The core principles that form the Catholic moral vision are: the sanctity of life, the dignity of the human person, the rights and corresponding duties, known together as “human rights” which include the right to life and to those conditions that are necessary for the development of the human development and the ability to live a life in conformity with human dignity; including the right to work and earn a living wage, acceptable working conditions, the right to organize, the right to adequate shelter, food, health care and education.

Catholic moral vision includes working to pass just laws or social policies through advocacy efforts where injustice exists.

“...the church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served. To carry out such a task, the church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the ‘signs of the times’ and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel” (Gaudium et Spes, no. 3 and 4).

The “signs of the times,” then, embody and reflect the movement of the Holy Spirit in human history working to bring about the redemption of people and creating the fuller realization of the Reign of God. Interpreting the “signs of the times” requires prayerful discernment, dialogue with all people of good will and a common collective action, or advocacy, to make just social change.

We do this most effectively through our cooperation with the Holy Spirit in the unifying act of the Eucharist which gives strength and purpose to our prophetic voice.

“Participation in the Eucharist ... is the expression par excellence of God's love, it calls us to join forces with all our brothers and sisters to confront today's challenges and make the earth a place that is pleasant to live in.” (Homily for the Closing of the 49th International Eucharistic Congress, Pope Benedict XVI)

Some concrete examples of “the signs” today that violate human dignity include: the sexual exploitation of youth by advertising and media, the various aspects of diminishing respect for the dignity of the human person in our society, the fear-based intolerance of people and the injustice of our immigration system, threats of terrorism and war, human trafficking and sweatshops, pornography, a dehumanized reproductive technology industry, embryonic research, surrogacy, growing rates of poverty (especially among children) and the use of technology to create and destroy human life. Amidst the signs of the times, we are called to be a sign of God’s light and love. As a people of faith, we are asked to live and teach the Light of Christ toward goodness, righteousness and truth.