

## **Social Justice: A Franciscan Perspective**

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When we look at all of our fellow human beings and other co-creatures in light of the Gospel, we will understand why the Church raises certain concerns in its teachings on Social Justice. Too often we fail to recognize what is unjust according to God's way of thinking, because in our experience things have always been that way. Therefore, we tend to accept them as they are, thinking that things are supposed to be that way.

We have tended to separate our theological beliefs from our understanding of and our analysis of society. So, we need some training and guidance in applying our theological beliefs to society (our social organization, economy, politics, laws, etc.) which we tend to evaluate according to merely secular values.

True social justice is neither liberal nor conservative, neither Democratic nor Republican. It may call for viewing things in a different way than we are used to; it may challenge our familiar attitudes. For that reason, a just vision of society may make us uncomfortable, but Jesus' teachings were never about being comfortable. Following Christ calls us to ongoing conversion. At times, therefore, we need to be made uncomfortable in our thinking in order to move closer to Christ's Gospel message.

For those of us who are Franciscan or associated with a Franciscan vision because we attend a Franciscan parish, a socially just vision of reality begins with our Franciscan understanding of Christ. In Franciscan theology, in God's plan of creation, God planned from the beginning that God would become human, so that a human, God's creature, could give perfect love to God.

God as human was not a result of sin, but of God's eternal self-giving plan of creation. God in human flesh was the model after which all else would be created. This is St. Paul's "first born of all Creation." After Adam's sin, the God-Human would have to live in a world infected by sin, and, therefore, endure suffering and death. Nevertheless, Jesus remains as the first of all creatures, the model from whom all other creatures receive their worth

Every human person and every creature, from the lowly blade of grass to the magnificent planets of the heavens, shares in the divine life and worth. That divine worth makes all creatures sacred and stands as the basis for their rights. This worth is conferred by God in creating them and is not based on the behavior of the person or creature. Nor is its value measured by its contribution to either the economy or to the

scheme of the universe. The justice due to him, her, or it comes from this sacred existence given by God. The rights of any creature are conferred by God in creating it and not from any human law or other human decision.

All creatures, both human and non-human, are in relationship to this "first-born of all creation" and in him to one another. This is a spiritual relationship. A truly Christian spirituality must include an understanding of this relationship. All of creation is part of our spirituality. This is a given and does not depend on what school of theology one may follow in one's piety and prayer life.

These are some of the fundamentals out of which I plan to share further reflections on Social Justice.