

Selections from the Catechism of the Catholic Church for Addressing Questions Arising from Disasters

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Below are selections from the Catechism of the Catholic Church which may help Catholic school teachers address questions and stimulate discussion about concerns arising from troubling world issues and disasters such as the December 24/04 earthquake and tsunami. Key passages from each selection are bolded for easier reference. They are grouped according to theme as follows:

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Christianity: A Living Faith

Our Christian faith is rooted in relationship with Jesus, who is risen and alive in our midst by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a living faith which must be lived in relationship with God in Christ and with our neighbour.

108 Still, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book". **Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, "not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living".**⁷³ If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, "open (our) minds to understand the Scriptures."⁷⁴

Why is there evil in the world?

272 Faith in God the Father Almighty can be put to the test by the experience of evil and suffering. **God can sometimes seem to be absent and incapable of stopping evil.** But in the most mysterious way God the Father has revealed his almighty power in the voluntary humiliation and Resurrection of his Son, by which he conquered evil. Christ crucified is thus "the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."¹¹¹ **It is in Christ's Resurrection and exaltation that the Father has shown forth "the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe".**¹¹²

273 **Only faith can embrace the mysterious ways of God's almighty power. This faith glories in its weaknesses in order to draw to itself Christ's power.**¹¹³ The Virgin Mary is the supreme model of this faith, for she believed that "nothing will be impossible with God", and was able to magnify the Lord: "For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."¹¹⁴

310 **But why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it?** With infinite power God could always create something better.¹⁷⁴ But with infinite wisdom and goodness **God freely willed to create a world "in a state of journeying"** towards its ultimate perfection. **In God's plan this process of becoming involves the appearance of certain beings and the disappearance of others, the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also physical evil as long as creation has not reached perfection.**¹⁷⁵

324 The fact that **God permits physical and even moral evil** is a mystery that God illuminates by his Son Jesus Christ who died and rose to vanquish evil. **Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life.**

Jesus, Conqueror of Evil: In Jesus' death and resurrection we find the answers to our questions about evil.

385 God is infinitely good and all his works are good. **Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature** which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures: and above all to the question of moral evil. **Where does evil come from?** "I sought whence evil comes and there was no solution", said St. Augustine,²⁵⁷ and his own painful quest would only be resolved by his conversion to the living God. For **"the mystery of lawlessness" is clarified only in the light of the "mystery of our religion"**.²⁵⁸ The revelation of divine love in Christ manifested at the same time the extent of evil and the superabundance of grace.²⁵⁹ **We must therefore approach the question of the origin of evil by fixing the eyes of our faith on him who alone is its conqueror.**²⁶⁰

The Laity: The "front lines of the Church," whose initiative can permeate the world with the Gospel for the right ordering of society.

899 **The initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life.** This initiative is a normal element of the life of the Church:

Lay believers are in the front line of Church life; for them the Church is the animating principle of human society. Therefore, they in particular ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the common Head, and of the bishops in communion with him. They are the Church.⁴³²

Importance of Earthly Progress: of "vital concern to the Kingdom of God" because it contributes "to the better ordering of Human society."

1049 "Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, **although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society.**"⁶⁴⁰

Witness-The Fruit of our Sacramental Life: The Sacraments empower us to live the charity of the Gospel in love of God and neighbour.

1134 The fruit of sacramental life is both personal and ecclesial. For every one of the faithful on the one hand, this fruit is life for God in Christ Jesus; for the Church, on the other, it is an increase in charity and in her mission of witness.

Eucharist and Commitment to the Poor:

1397 **The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren:**

You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognize your brother,...
You dishonor this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food
someone judged worthy to take part in this meal.... God freed you from all your
sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful.²³³

Human Dignity: Every person is made in the image and likeness of God, who is a communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are called to live in communion with all people, because all of us are made in God's image.

1702 **The divine image is present in every man.** It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the union of the divine persons among themselves (cf chapter two).

Justice as Virtue: To be just, we must be in right relationship with God and neighbour.

1807 Justice is the moral virtue that **consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor.** Justice toward God is called the "virtue of religion." **Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good.** the just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the **uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor.** "You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."⁶⁸ "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."⁶⁹

Charity: the greatest social commandment –it empowers us to live justly through self-giving.

1889 Without the help of grace, men would not know how "to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil, and the violence which under the illusion of fighting evil only makes it worse."¹³ **This is the path of charity, that is, of the love of God and of neighbor. Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it. Charity inspires a life of self-giving:** "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it."¹⁴

The Common Good: The notion of the Common Good reminds us that we were made to live in communion, and should seek the good of all.

1905 In keeping with the social nature of man, the **good of each individual is necessarily related to the common good, which in turn can be defined only in reference to the human person:**

Do not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek the common good together.²⁵

1906 **By common good is to be understood "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."**²⁶ The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority. **It consists of three essential elements:**

1907 **First**, the common good presupposes **respect for the person** as such. In the name of the common good, public authorities are bound **to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person**. Society should permit each of its members **to fulfill his vocation**. In particular, the common good resides in the **conditions for the exercise of the natural freedoms** indispensable for the development of the human vocation, such as **"the right to act according to a sound norm of conscience** and to safeguard . . . privacy, and rightful **freedom also in matters of religion."**²⁷

1908 **Second**, the common good **requires the social well-being and development of the group itself**. Development is the epitome of all social duties. Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; **but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on.**²⁸

1909 **Finally**, the common good **requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order**. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defence.

1910 **Each human community possesses a common good** which permits it to be recognized as such; it is **in the political community** that its most complete realization is found. **It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies.**

1911 Human interdependence is increasing and gradually spreading throughout the world. the unity of the human family, embracing people who enjoy equal natural dignity, implies a universal common good. This good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to "provide for the different needs of men; this will involve the sphere of social life to which belong questions of food, hygiene, education, . . . and certain situations arising here and there, as for example . . . alleviating the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world, and assisting migrants and their families."²⁹

1912 The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: "The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around."³⁰ This order is founded on truth, built up in justice, and animated by love.

1924 The common good comprises "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (GS 26 I).

1925 The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members.

1926 The dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good. Everyone should be concerned to create and support institutions that improve the conditions of human life.

1927 It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society. the common good of the whole human family calls for an organization of society on the international level.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

1928 Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.

1931 Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self,' above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity."³⁷ No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a "neighbor," a brother.

1932 The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."³⁸

1938 There exist **also sinful inequalities that affect millions of men and women**. These are in open contradiction of the Gospel:

Their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions. Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace.⁴⁴

Human Solidarity

1940 Solidarity is **manifested in the first place by the distribution of goods and remuneration for work**. It also **presupposes the effort for a more just social order** where tensions are better able to be reduced and conflicts more readily settled by **negotiation**.

1941 **Socio-economic problems can be resolved only with the help of all the forms of solidarity: solidarity of the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves, between employers and employees in a business, solidarity among nations and peoples. International solidarity is a requirement of the moral order; world peace depends in part upon this.**

1942 **The virtue of solidarity goes beyond material goods**. In spreading the spiritual goods of the faith, the Church has promoted, and often opened new paths for, the development of temporal goods as well. and so throughout the centuries has the Lord's saying been verified: **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well"**.⁴⁷

For two thousand years this sentiment has lived and endured in the soul of the Church, impelling souls then and now to the heroic charity of monastic farmers, liberators of slaves, healers of the sick, and messengers of faith, civilization, and science to all generations and all peoples for the sake of creating the social conditions capable of offering to everyone possible a life worthy of man and of a Christian.⁴⁸

1947 The equal dignity of human persons requires the effort to reduce excessive social and economic inequalities. It gives urgency to the elimination of sinful inequalities.

Respect for the dead

2300 **The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. the burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy;**⁹¹ it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Distribution of Goods

2401 The **seventh commandment** forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbor and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods. It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor. **For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity.**

The Universal Destination and the Private Ownership of Goods

2402 In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to **the common stewardship of mankind** to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits.¹⁸⁶ **The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race.** However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. the appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men.

2403 The right to private property, acquired by work or received from others by inheritance or gift, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. **the universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise.**

2404 **"In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself."**¹⁸⁷ The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family.

2405 **Goods of production** - material or immaterial - such as land, factories, practical or artistic skills, **oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. Those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for guests, for the sick and the poor.**

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.**²²³ On the one side there are those nations possessing and developing the means of growth and, on the other, those accumulating debts.

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.²²⁷ The efforts of poor countries working for growth and liberation must be supported.²²⁸ This doctrine must be applied especially in the area of agricultural labor. Peasants, especially in the Third World, form the overwhelming majority of the poor.

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.²²⁹

Love For the Poor

2443 God blesses those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them: "Give to him who begs from you, do not refuse him who would borrow from you"; "you received without pay, give without pay."²³¹ It is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones.²³² When "the poor have the good news preached to them," it is the sign of Christ's presence.²³³

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.²³⁴ 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."²³⁵ It extends not only to material poverty but also to the many forms of cultural and religious poverty.²³⁶

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."²³⁸ "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".²³⁹

When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice.²⁴⁰

2447 The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities.²⁴¹ 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.²⁴² 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.²⁴³

He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none and he who has food must do likewise.²⁴⁴ But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you.²⁴⁵ If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?²⁴⁶

2448 "In its various forms - **material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness and death - 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. This misery elicited the compassion of Christ the Savior**, who willingly took it upon himself and identified himself with the least of his brethren. Hence, **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.**"²⁴⁷

2449 **Beginning with the Old Testament**, all kinds of juridical measures (the **jubilee year of forgiveness of debts, prohibition of loans at interest and the keeping of collateral, the obligation to tithe, the daily payment of the day-laborer, the right to glean vines and fields**) answer the exhortation of Deuteronomy: "For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in the land.'"²⁴⁸ Jesus makes these words his own: "The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."²⁴⁹ In so doing he does not soften the vehemence of former oracles against "buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals . . .," but **invites us to recognize his own presence in the poor who are his brethren.**²⁵⁰

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.**"²⁵¹

2463 *How can we not recognize Lazarus, the hungry beggar in the parable (cf. □ Lk 17:19-31), in the multitude of human beings without bread, a roof or a place to stay? How can we fail to hear Jesus: "As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" (□ Mt 25:45)?*

Poverty of Heart

2544 Jesus enjoins his disciples to prefer him to everything and everyone, and bids them "renounce all that [they have]" for his sake and that of the Gospel.³³⁴ Shortly before his passion he gave them the example of the poor widow of Jerusalem who, out of her

poverty, gave all that she had to live on.³³⁵ **The precept of detachment from riches is obligatory for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven.**

2545 All Christ's faithful are to "direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect charity by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty."³³⁶

2546 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit."**³³⁷ The Beatitudes reveal an order of happiness and grace, of beauty and peace. **Jesus celebrates the joy of the poor, to whom the Kingdom already belongs.**³³⁸

The Word speaks of voluntary humility as "poverty in spirit"; the Apostle gives an example of God's poverty when he says: **"For your sakes he became poor."**³³⁹

2547 The Lord grieves over the rich, because they find their consolation in the abundance of goods.³⁴⁰ **"Let the proud seek and love earthly kingdoms, but blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."**³⁴¹ Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow.³⁴² **Trust in God is a preparation for the blessedness of the poor. They shall see God.**

The Our Father

2792 Finally, if we pray the Our Father sincerely, **we leave individualism behind, because the love that we receive frees us from it. the "our" at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, like the "us" of the last four petitions, excludes no one. If we are to say it truthfully, our divisions and oppositions have to be overcome.**⁵¹

2793 The baptized cannot pray to "our" Father without bringing before him all those for whom he gave his beloved Son. **God's love has no bounds, neither should our prayer.**⁵² Praying "our" Father opens to us the dimensions of his love revealed in Christ: praying with and for all who do not yet know him, so that Christ may "gather into one the children of God."⁵³ God's care for all men and for the whole of creation has inspired all the great practitioners of prayer; it should extend our prayer to the full breadth of love whenever we dare to say "our" Father.

Thy Kingdom Come

2818 In the Lord's Prayer, **"thy kingdom come"** refers primarily to the final coming of the reign of God through Christ's return.⁸⁸ **But, far from distracting the Church from her mission in this present world, this desire commits her to it all the more strongly.** Since Pentecost, the coming of that Reign is the work of the Spirit of the Lord who "complete(s) his work on earth and brings us the fullness of grace."⁸⁹

2820 By a discernment according to the Spirit, Christians have to distinguish between the growth of the Reign of God and the progress of the culture and society in which they are involved. This distinction is not a separation. **Man's vocation to eternal life does not suppress, but actually reinforces, his duty to put into action in this world the energies and means received from the Creator to serve justice and peace.**⁹³

"Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

2831 But **the presence of those who hunger** because they lack bread opens up another profound meaning of this petition. the drama of hunger in the world **calls Christians who pray sincerely to exercise responsibility toward their brethren, both in their personal behavior and in their solidarity with the human family. This petition of the Lord's Prayer cannot be isolated from the parables of the poor man Lazarus and of the Last Judgment.**¹¹⁸

2832 **As leaven in the dough, the newness of the kingdom should make the earth "rise" by the Spirit of Christ.**¹¹⁹ This must be shown by the establishment of justice in personal and social, economic and international relations, without ever forgetting that there are no just structures without people who want to be just.

2833 **"Our" bread is the "one" loaf for the "many." In the Beatitudes "poverty" is the virtue of sharing: it calls us to communicate and share both material and spiritual goods, not by coercion but out of love, so that the abundance of some may remedy the needs of others.**¹²⁰