

Tuesday Reflection 28 July 2020

### **The Common Good - 1**

*The Kingdom of heaven is like the yeast ... mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through* (Matthew 13:33)

In 1996 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published a 'Statement' on *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*. The Statement stems from the realisation that although the Kingdom of God may reach its ultimate fulfilment in Heaven, it has to start here on Earth.

In it, the bishops point out that "as Catholics we are not without resources in trying to meet the need for moral guidance in the social and political sphere. There is an abundance of wisdom in Scripture, in the teachings of the early Fathers (and Mothers - MT) of the Church and the writings of numerous Christian thinkers down the ages. Furthermore, we have at our disposal the corpus of official doctrine known as Catholic Social Teaching. Together with the relevant documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the statements of local and regional conferences of bishops, the "social encyclicals" of various popes since 1891 represent a formidable body of insight and guidance."

One of the early Fathers is St John Chrysostom, who in the 4th century wrote:

This is the rule of the most perfect Christianity, its most exact definition, its highest point, namely the seeking of the common good ... for nothing can so make a person an imitator of Christ as caring for our neighbours.

From this follows the dictum that 'One thrives if all thrives. If one does not thrive, none thrive'

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has been called the Catholic Church's best-kept secret; one could wish it were given as much prominence as other aspects of Church doctrine, which tend to dwell on the individual rather than on the community. When, for example, did you last hear a homily breaking open a Papal social encyclical?

One of the purposes of CST is to provide the moral guidance that will enable the laity in particular to 'read the signs of the times' and to act as leaven within the body politic. The Church is very clear on this point. In the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* the Second Vatican Council stated that "the apostolate of lay people ... is exercised ...when they endeavour to have the Gospel spirit permeate and improve the temporal order, going about it in a way that bears clear witness and helps forward the salvation of humanity."

- to be continued

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