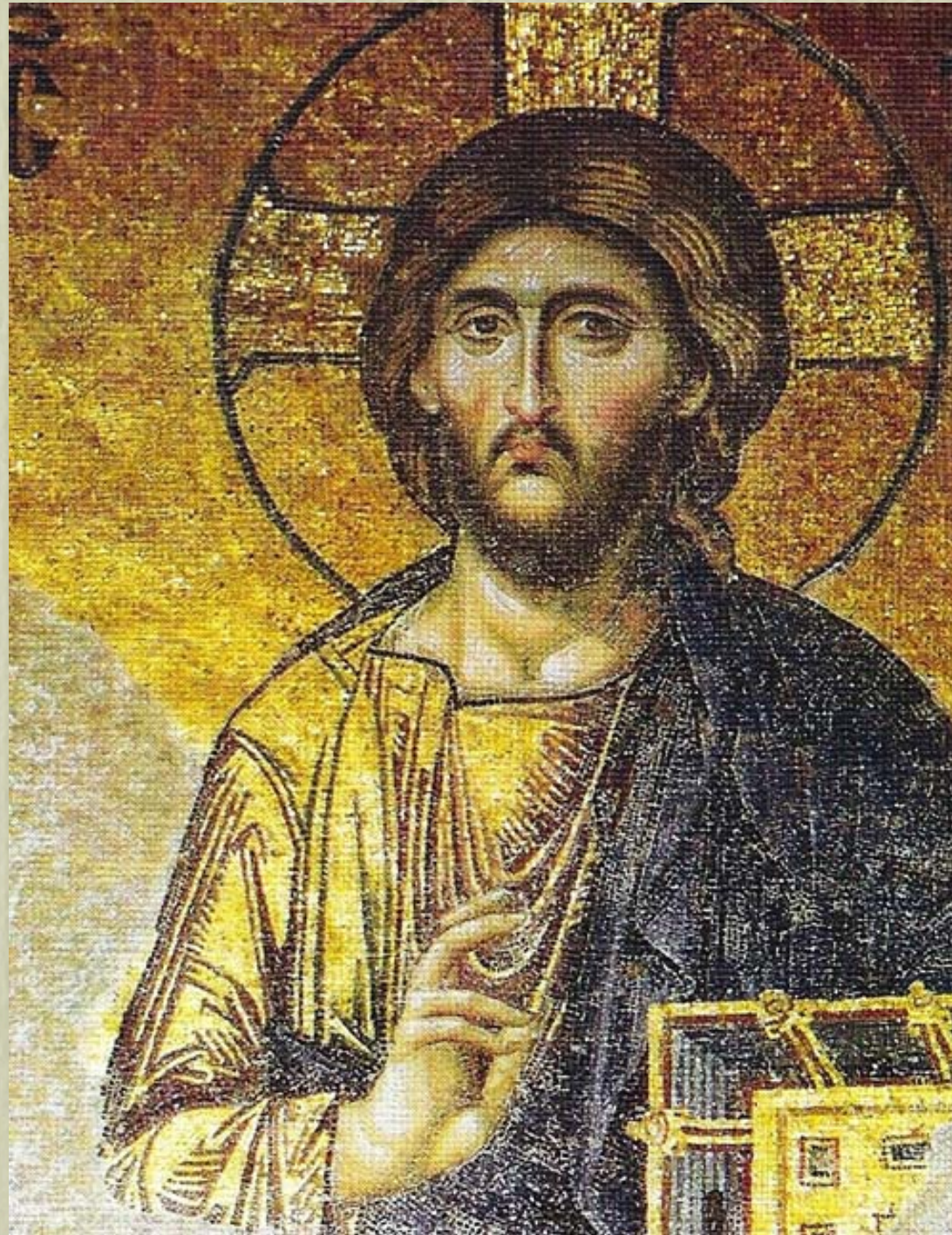
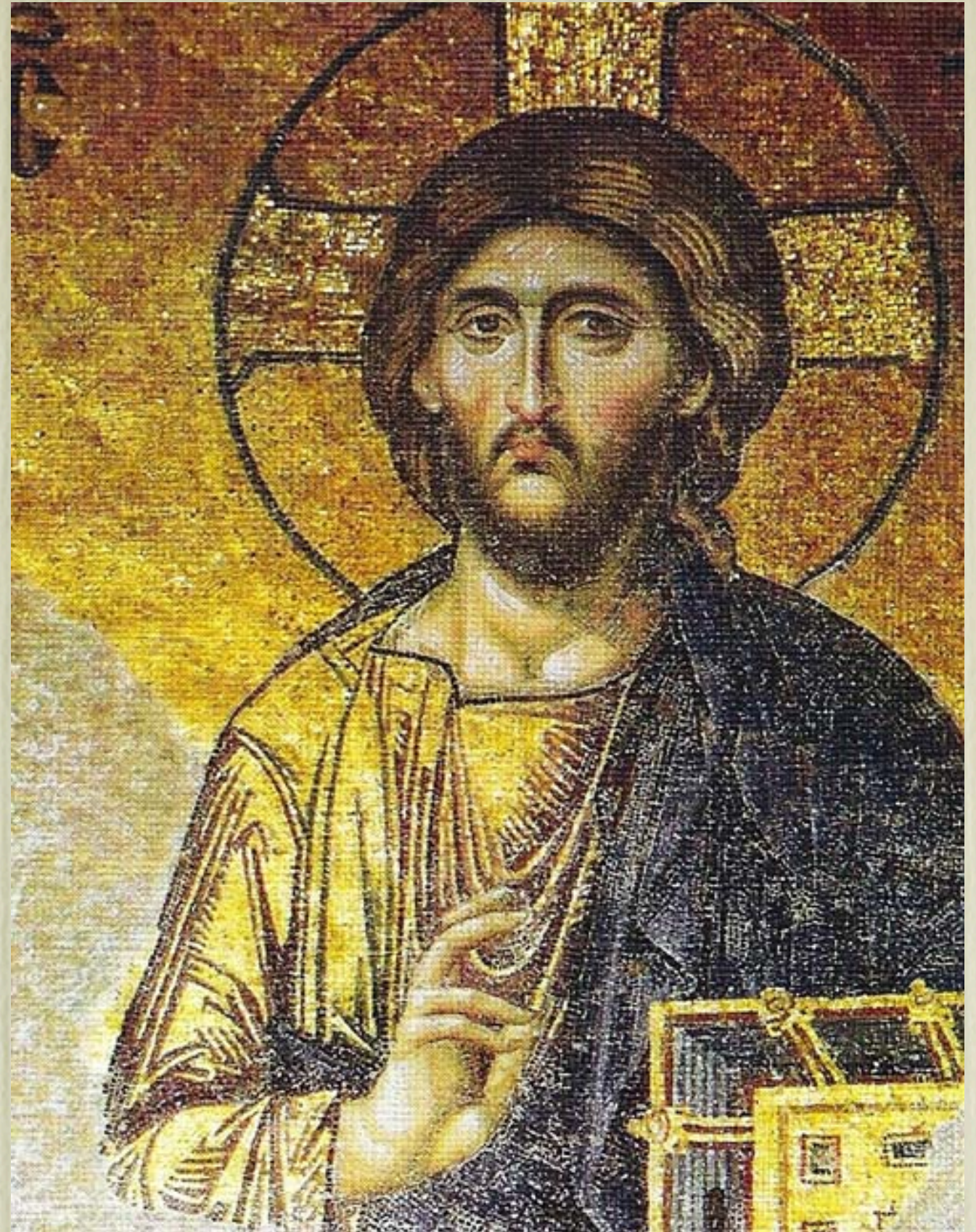


10. Justice in the New Testament



Laudato Si' n. 83

‘The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.’



If we do not listen, we should heed Jesus' warning:

‘You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean’(Matthew 23:24-26).

Jesus of Nazareth: God's Promised Messiah (Christ)

‘They will name him
Immanuel, which means:
God is with us’ (Matthew 1:23).

‘You will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.’
(John 8:32)

‘If the Son sets you free
then you are truly free.’
(John 8:36).



The Joy of the Gospel n. 178

‘To believe in a Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love means realising that “he thereby confers upon them an infinite dignity”(JP II Message to the Handicapped 16.11.1980). To believe that the Son of God assumed our human flesh means that each human person has been taken up into the very heart of God. To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removes any doubt about the boundless love which ennobles each human being.

Our redemption has a social dimension because “God in Christ, redeems not only the human person, but also the social relations existing between people”(Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Compendium n. 52). To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realising that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds.

The Joy of the Gospel n. 178 continued

‘Evangelisation is meant to cooperate with this liberating work of the Spirit. The very mystery of the Trinity reminds us that we have been created in the image of that divine communion, and so we cannot achieve fulfilment or salvation purely by our own efforts.

From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelisation and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelisation. Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God’s love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.’

The Joy of the Gospel n. 12

‘The mission is first and foremost the Lord’s work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is “the first and greatest evangeliser”. In every activity of evangelisation, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that “he has loved us first” (1 John 4:19) and that he alone “gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.’

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that justice was at the heart of Jesus' message, especially in relation to those who were least able to insist on it. Luke sets up Jesus' key agenda in the opening scene of Jesus' public ministry, when he has Jesus identify with the following text from Isaiah:



‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free’(Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1-2).

The Risen Jesus gives his Spirit to his disciples
enabling us to continue his mission to the world

‘It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.
The life I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God,
loving me and giving himself for me’(Galatians 2:20).

‘Righteousness that comes through the faithfulness of Christ,
the righteousness that is from God’(Philippians 3:9).

‘Seek first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness’(Matthew 6:33).

In Jesus we see God liberating the world. God is offering salvation. God's love is attracting the world out of sin. His gift of the Spirit makes the 'Exodus' possible.

The mission of the Church (the community of Jesus' disciples)

'I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20).

Paul saw his mission as an expression of YHWH's faithfulness

'It was not I, but the grace of God that is with me' (1 Corinthians 15:10).

God is faithful to his commitment, and it is for ALL

Romans 3:21-22, 26

‘God’s righteousness has been revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus, the Messiah, for **all** who believe ... God is righteous and he makes righteous **all** who have the faithfulness of Jesus.’

Romans 10:4

‘The fulfilment of the law is Christ, so that there may be righteousness for **everyone** who believes.’

‘If **anyone** is thirsty, come to me’(John 7:37).

‘**Anyone** who follows me will have the light of life’(John 8:12).

Ultimately our lives are judged by how open we have been to God's justice and compassion. Jesus' parable on the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) echoes Isaiah 58:6-9.

Isaiah 58:6-9

‘Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of YHWH shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and YHWH will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am.’

All are called to live justly

and

justice must be for all

Mark 1:40-45 (embracing the outsiders)

‘A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you want to, you can make me clean.”

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “Of course I want to. Be made clean!”

Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country. People, however, came to him from every quarter.’

Mark 12:41-44

The widow's mite

‘This poor widow has put in more
than all who have contributed to the temple treasury,
for they have put in what they had over,
but she, from the little she has,
has put in everything she possessed,
all she had to live on.’

III. Living justly: The Letter of James

James is faithful to his Jewish heritage and to Jesus when he includes in his definition of religion: ‘to care for orphans and widows in their distress’(James 1:27).

He insists on action, not words: ‘If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says: “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat your fill,” without supplying their bodily needs, what is the good of that?’(James 2:15-16).

He categorises neglecting the poor and ‘spending what you get on your pleasures’ as equivalent to adultery, for it is to break our part in our covenant with God (see James 4:3-4). ‘The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, wages that you have kept back by fraud, cry out to God’(James 5:4).

The early Christian writers had no doubt about the centrality of the demands of justice in living as disciples of Jesus. Examples abound.

The Letter of Barnabas (from the early second century) states: ‘relax all your iniquitous restrictions, loosen the shackles of your oppressive covenants, let your ruined debtors go free, and tear up all your unjust agreements. Break up your bread into portions for the starving; and if you see a man who is in want of clothing, fit him out yourself. Bring in the homeless under your own roof.’

The following, from the Pastoral Rule of Gregory the Great (end of the sixth century) is typical: ‘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’ (Pastoral Rule 3.21).

And today!

Vatican II G&S 29§2-3

‘Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.’

‘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.’

“Let each one examine himself to see what he had done up to now, and what he ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustices, if at the same time one does not realise how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first ... The Christian's hope comes primarily from the fact that we know that the Lord is working with us in the world, continuing in his Body, which is the Church - and, through the Church in the whole of mankind - the Redemption which was accomplished on the cross and which burst forth in victory on the morning of the Resurrection.’

John-Paul II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987 n. 28

‘Side by side with the miseries of under-development, themselves unacceptable, we find ourselves up against a form of over-development, equally inadmissible, because like the former it is contrary to what is good and to true happiness. The over-development which consists in an excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups, easily makes people slaves of “possession” and of immediate gratification, with no other horizon than the multiplication or continual replacement of the things already owned with others still better. This is the so-called civilisation of “consumption” or “consumerism”, which involves so much “throwing-away” and “waste”. An object already owned but now superseded by something better is discarded, with no thought of its possible lasting value in itself, nor of some other human being who is poorer.’

John-Paul II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987 n. 42

“One of the characteristic themes and guidelines dealt with by the Magisterium in recent years is the option or love of preference for the poor. This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness...It cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care, and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the rich man who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate.’

The 1979 Conference of the Latin American Bishops at Puebla spoke of

‘the faces of young children, struck down by poverty before they are born

the faces of young people who are disoriented because they cannot find their place in society, and who are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to find work

the faces of indigenous people living marginalised lives in inhuman situations

the faces of the unemployed and the under-employed subject to cold economic calculations

the faces of old people frequently marginalised in a progress-orientated society.’

Martin Luther King (1963)

‘I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action’; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by the myth of time; and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a ‘more convenient season.’ Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.’

Paul VI often spoke of our mission to built 'a civilisation of love.'

- Pentecost 1966 Paul VI announced the establishment of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians: 'A catholic heart means a heart with universal dimensions: a heart that has overcome the basic narrowness that prevents us listening to our calling towards supreme love. It means a magnanimous heart, an ecumenical heart, a heart capable of embracing the whole world.'

- The Church reverences and respects the unique mystery of each person's experience and the many ways in which people's experience is expressed culturally.
- The Church's mission is to share (with everyone who wants to listen) the Good News of what Jesus revealed about God
and about the meaning of life
and how we can best live to the full.



Matthew 11:28-29

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.



Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Prayer of 5th Sunday of Lent

‘Father in heaven, the love of your Son
led him to accept the suffering of the cross
in order that his brothers and sisters might glory in new life.
Change our selfishness into self-giving.
Help us to embrace the world which you have given us,
that we may transform the darkness of its pain
into the life and joy of Easter.’

‘Do the truth in love’(Ephesians 4:15).