Consciousness of Solidarity and Social Justice

An awareness of the social dimension of human life is an important principle in understanding Christian morality, especially in light of the great emphasis on individualism in our society. The social aspect of what it means to be human is revealed in the natural inclination we have to seek social interaction and establish community. This awareness serves as a moral foundation for an attitude of solidarity with each other and leads to a dedication to social justice for everyone. Our Gospel commitment to Christ’s Kingdom of love, justice, and mercy always includes advocating and supporting fairness for all. God calls us to form community and to correct both the symptoms and causes of injustice that rip apart the solidarity of a community.

Before God gave the Commandments at Sinai, he entered into a covenant of love with the community of Israel (cf. Ex 19:3-6). Once the covenant was established, God gave the people the Ten Commandments in order to teach them the way to live the covenant of love.

In Christ we have been called to a New Covenant and a New Law that fulfills and perfects the Old Law. We also are invited to experience God’s love for us and to return that love to God and to our neighbor. Our love of neighbor includes our solidarity with the human community and a commitment to social justice for all.

We need to respect the human dignity of every person. Governments and all other social institutions should serve and enhance the dignity of people. Society has the responsibility to create the conditions that favor the growth of virtues and of authentic spiritual and material values.

People need to live in a human community where the authority is based on human nature and recognized and understood as having its origin in God (cf. CCC, nos. 1898, 1899). Political authority should be used for the common good. “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 easily’” (CCC, no. 1924, citing GS, no. 26 §1). Governments ought to use morally acceptable means to foster the common good of all and establish the conditions that assure citizens of the proper exercise of their freedom. In fostering this common good excessive intervention by the government in the lives of individuals is to be avoided. The principle of subsidiarity teaches that governments should help and support individuals and groups for whom they are responsible without controlling their freedom and initiative (cf. CCC, no. 1883).
Just as governments and social institutions need to respect the unique human dignity of every individual, it is also the responsibility of every individual to do the same. Attitudes of prejudice and bias against any individual for any reason, as well as actions or judgments based on prejudiced or biased views, violate God’s will and law.

Social justice is both an attitude and a practical response based on the principle that everyone should look at another person as another self. It is also a virtue that directs all the other virtues of individuals toward the common good. Civil laws can partially help to eliminate fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness that cause injustice, but an inner spiritual conversion is also needed.

Solidarity with others at every level is a way of accomplishing this. Solidarity takes many forms: “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” (CCC, no. 1941).

Examples of offenses against human solidarity are slavery and racism. Slavery reduces a human being to an object to be bought and sold. It is a failure to recognize the God-given dignity and rights of a human being. Racism is an attitude that rejects the fundamental equality of all human beings. It shows itself in discrimination and unjust actions against people of other races. Both slavery and racism are gravely immoral.