

## **ROOTED IN THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST**

Jesus Christ is the model for the work of Catholic Charities. From the beginning of his public ministry, Christ gives special attention to poor and vulnerable people. Reading the scriptures in his hometown synagogue, he states, "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). In this "mission statement," launching the ministry that will ultimately lead to his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus makes it clear that anyone interested in following him must give special attention to those who most need it: the poor, the widow, the prisoner, the stranger, and the disabled.

Jesus underscores this mission in his subsequent words and actions. In two of the Gospels (Mark 12:31, Matthew 22:39), Jesus explains to his followers that ultimately we will be judged by how well we lived the greatest commandments - loving God and loving our neighbor. In Mark, Jesus is approached by one of the scribes, impressed with his teaching, who wishes to test him further. The scribe asks, "Which commandment is the greatest of all?" Jesus replies, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Mark 12:28 - 31). The scribe proclaims "You are right...this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Jesus affirms his response (and quiets the crowd), saying, "You are not far off from the Kingdom of God."

When Jesus proclaims the Beatitudes, he offers us an "attitude" or perspective to live by that identifies a life of solidarity with the poor, of hungering for justice, of peacemaking, with the kingdom of God:

*Then he looked up at his disciples and said:*

*"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.*

*"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*

*"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you – on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.*

*"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.*

*"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.*

*"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false Prophets." (Luke 6:20-26)*

The Beatitudes establish the perspective by which we organize and structure Catholic Charities: we are called to reflect the kingdom of God in our operations, policies, and actions.

Through the Beatitudes and the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches that responding to suffering people is not simply a matter of following prescribed laws and rules; it is about embracing the Law of Love. In Luke's recounting of the Good Samaritan story (10:25 - 37), a scholar of the law asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit everlasting life?" Unsatisfied with Jesus' affirmation of the responsibility to love God and neighbor, he presses further, asking, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with the parable we know so well. A pious man, a priest, and a Samaritan (Jews and Samaritans shared a mutual hatred at the time) all encounter a wounded Jewish crime victim, abandoned for dead on the side of the road. The first two pass the victim by, prohibited by Jewish law from touching the "unclean" victim. The Samaritan comes next. He binds the man's wounds, takes him to

an inn, and pays the innkeeper to care for the wounded man until he returns. Jesus asks the lawyer, "Who was a neighbor to the man?" The scholar replies, "The one who showed him mercy."

The parable contains a powerful lesson: love and compassion are the supreme law, and love brings with it certain obligations. Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, teaches that the parable establishes "a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter 'by chance,'" meaning we must love the neighbor we do not know as much as those we do.

According to some scholars, Jesus himself is the model of the Good Samaritan. We as "church" - in part through the ministries of Catholic Charities - are called to be like the innkeeper, to organize care for those in need, and we will be repaid at the end of time.

From the creation of the universe to the passion of Christ, Biblical themes underlie the ministries of Catholic Charities. They provide the inspiration and impetus for the earliest church ministries with poor and vulnerable people, documented in the New Testament and discussed in more detail in the next resource. The scriptures referenced in this short introduction are only the beginning.