



Solidarity *Principle VI*

We continue our summer series on Catholic Social Teaching by looking at the sixth principle: Solidarity.

Solidarity is not just a feeling, but rather a commitment to the well being of another. It is a virtue, i.e., a habit whereby you work for the good of others because they are children of God.

This principle is based on a few assumptions. First, it assumes that if God is our Creator, then all human beings are His children, regardless of race, nationality, and belief. In a speech in Bolivia on July 8, 2015, Pope Francis remarked, "We cannot believe in God the Father without seeing a brother or sister in every person, and we cannot follow Jesus without giving our lives for those for whom he died on the cross."

Additionally, this principle assumes we are social creatures and as such, we need one another to flourish. In other words, God has given you gifts to be used for the sake others. Similarly, He has given others gifts for your sake. In short, we do not grow as isolated islands, but rather together through a mutual sharing of material and spiritual gifts that God has given us.

Solidarity stands in contrast to the radical individualism that we regularly experience in our culture. Individualism is the philosophy that the private good of the individual (e.g., his or her desires, interests, goals) takes precedence over the state or a social group. It sees community as an unfortunate necessity and others as an obstacle to individual freedom.

Solidarity, on the other hand, while acknowledging the dignity and rights of each individual, reminds us that as individuals, we remain part of a community and *can only reach our fulfillment within the context of a community*. St. Paul uses the metaphor of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians to teach us that we grow and suffer together. Specifically, he says, "*If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.*" (1 Cor. 12:26)

Additionally, there has been an unfortunate movement in our culture focusing on differences and what divides us. We are all aware of the talking points on injustices arising from differences in nationality, race, sex, and income. Consequently, our culture experienced a tremendous amount of fragmentation wherein groups see each other not as interrelated, but as enemies.

In this light, the virtue of solidarity is extremely critical for our times. How beautiful when persons are willing to try to transcend cultural, political, social, and geographic differences to embrace the other as a person, i.e., someone made in God's image.

This willingness, of course, does not mean that we must accept all beliefs and ways of life. We can respect the views of others, including their beliefs and lifestyles, but also have the courage to critique actions/behaviors contrary to God's will, human reason, and the common good. In short, it takes humility and maturity to debate ideas and lifestyles, while simultaneously display compassion and love persons as persons.

Finally, we must not forget that the practice of solidarity is an essential part of our faith. Concerning this, 1 John 4:20 says, *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen."* In other words, your love for God is expressed and measured by your love for neighbor.

Practically, solidarity is one of the most challenging principles to live. On a pastoral visit to Cagliari on September 22, 2013, Pope Francis said in a meeting with the poor and prison inmates, "This word *solidarity* runs the risk of being deleted from the dictionary because it is a word that bothers us. It bothers us, why? Because it requires you to look at another and give yourself to another with love." While it can be painful at times to love others, our faith teaches us again and again that it always brings life for you and for others to give yourself away in love. ~St. Thérèse, pray for us!



Goldy and friend practicing solidarity