



OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Instead of grabbing rice, hoard your treasures in heaven

WE RECENTLY witnessed something that many of us have not experienced before: A rush to buy and stock up rice for fear of further price increases and possible shortages.

Anxious at the sight of emptying supermarket shelves, people grabbed what they could get. Perhaps it reflects our "survival instinct".

But we are also born with a deep sense of connection with one another. God made us all to be one family. Each person is not meant to be alone, trying to survive by himself or herself. We are made to depend on each other and help one another. That's what members of a family do!

What has this got to do with the rice situation? Well, whenever we face a threat, our fears kick in and it becomes tempting to think in terms of "every man for himself". We grab that extra bag of rice we do not really need, because we can afford it.

Meanwhile however, there are others unable to get the rice they need to feed their families.

In some nearby countries, the poor have not been able to get hold even of rice produced in their own countries, and which is supposed to be sold to them at subsidised prices.

In our social teachings, the Church reminds us of the principle of the Universal Destination of Goods. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us that "God destined the earth and all it contains for all human beings and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 69).

In other words, God intended what He made to be enjoyed by everybody, not just those who can afford it. In His plan, the earth and all creation are given

so that each of us will have what we need.

In fact, everyone has a right to what is needed for his or her survival and proper development. This is because every person is infinitely important to God.

That extra bag of rice hoarded in our cupboards will be spoiled by weevils within three months. In that time, others will be struggling to have enough to eat. This sad situation certainly does not seem in line with God's intent for the universal destination of goods.

In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus tells the parable of a rich man who happened to enjoy a windfall and decided to build larger barns, storing up the grain for himself.

He thought his future was secure, but God knew that he would die that very night and asked: "...the things you have prepared, to whom will



they belong?"

Jesus concluded the parable saying: "Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God."

What does matter to God then? The answer lies in the greatest commandment from Jesus: It is love. Love for God and being able to love our neighbour as ourselves. Love leads us to go beyond the kind of behaviour that says "me first".

Love makes us think of the needs of others, even those in other countries, and reflect on how our actions ultimately affect them. Love makes us see their needs as our very own.

The Church urges us to keep an eye especially on the needs of the most poor and often-neglected people. In Catholic social teaching, this is referred to as the "preferential option for the poor".

It is usually the most voiceless people, those whom society deems as "unimportant", who become left out in the race for survival (and for rice!).

As Christians, we are called to find Christ especially in the poorest of the poor and heed his exhortation: "I was hungry and you gave me food." (Matthew 25: 35)

This is the spirit of solidarity that pleases God. And in this spirit, we will indeed store up for ourselves lasting treasure in heaven "where no thief can steal and no moth can destroy". (Luke 12:33)

So the next time we're tempted to join a mad rush to grab, we should pause and reflect on the impact of our actions on the community, especially the poorest of the poor. What a joy it will be then to be part of a truly One human family.



LABOUR DAY

All work is holy

AS WE celebrate May 1 and Labour Day, let us pause and reflect on what Jesus and our popes have taught us through the ages about work.

Indeed, one of the key principles of our social teachings is that "Human Work is Holy".

This principle teaches us that human work even in its humblest form has an intrinsic dignity, because it flows from the hands of one who is infinitely special in the eyes of God.

God has given us a role in co-creating the world and making it a better place. Hence whatever work we do, whether cleaning tables or clearing arteries, we can be proud of it as long as it promotes human development.

The dignity of work also implies the need to ensure that all people have working conditions worthy of the children of God.

Jesus and Joseph were workers

In 1955, Pope Pius XII declared May 1 the feast of St Joseph the Worker. But the relationship between Joseph and the cause of workers has a longer history.

The Church has from the beginning emphasised that Jesus was a carpenter,

obviously trained by Joseph in both the satisfactions and the challenges of that vocation.

Pope John Paul II: 'Work is for man and not Man for work'

In the document *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Working), Pope John Paul II says that "the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature: However true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is "for man" and not man "for work".

The pope also says that in the final analysis, labour and capital are indispensable components of the process of production in any social system - it is clear that even if it is because of their work needs that people unite to secure their rights, their union remains a constructive factor of social order and solidarity, and it is impossible to ignore it.

Pope Benedict XVI: 'Humble worker in God's vineyard'

When Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany was elected pope, he took the name Pope Benedict XVI and said: "The cardinals have elected me, a simple, humble worker in God's vineyard. I am consoled by the fact that the Lord knows how to work and how to act, even with insufficient tools, and I especially trust in your prayers."

