



## Archbishop Shelton's Pastoral Reflections

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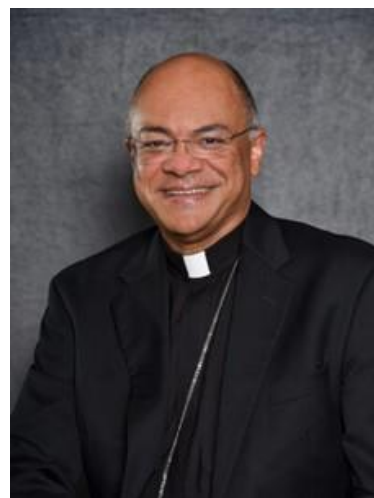
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### **Spiritual works of mercy are necessary for Christians who want to be like Christ**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Gospels portray Jesus as a man whose words could be both disturbing and comforting. He spoke out forcefully against hypocrisy and injustice, but he gave great comfort to those who were suffering—physically, emotionally or spiritually. We are called to act as Jesus did—to perform the spiritual works of mercy known as “admonishing sinners” and “comforting the afflicted.”

When we admonish sinners, we warn them against the harm they are doing to themselves and others—and especially to their relationship with God. This spiritual work of mercy is not for the self-righteous hypocrites that Jesus spoke out against so often. All of us are sinners, and we all need to be warned against the harmful effects of our self-centeredness. That’s why the Church urges her ministers to have a spiritual director. It’s also why each of us is invited to take full advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession).



When we warn sinners about the harmful effects of their behavior, we should do it out of love. When parents admonish a child saying, “Don’t talk to strangers,” they are not nagging or scolding; they are giving the child a loving warning about real dangers that exist in our society today.

The same is true when these same parents admonish older children, including young adults, about attending Sunday Mass. The dangers they are warning against are every bit as real (only more subtle), and the loving admonition that is given isn’t nagging or scolding; it’s a gift that comes from parents who know from their own experience why the Church’s Sunday obligation is a blessing and not a burden.

As faithful Christians, we have an obligation to advocate for the poor and the vulnerable. We are called to speak out against cultural values that weaken marriage and the family or that prevent individuals from reaching their full potential as human beings made in God's image.

Sinners can be very secretive. Frequently we know our sins but are defensive about them. If the truth is not made known, our sins remain hidden and self-destructive. Though honesty may cause strife at times, we must tell people when they are sinning—and let others do the same for us. We must not judge others, but especially when sins are committed in plain sight, they should be addressed.

Jesus admonished sinners all the time, but he didn't judge them or reject them. On the contrary, he welcomed them—always inviting them to repent and be free of their burdens. Jesus admonished not to condemn but to save.

Jesus didn't just issue warnings. He also comforted the sorrowful. Think of Martha and Mary and all of the family members and friends in the Gospel who received consolation and hope as a result of Jesus' healing words. Jesus wept. He was filled with compassion and mercy. He was present to the sick and the dying. Even on the cross, when no one would have blamed him for thinking of himself, He prayed for us sinners ("Father forgive them...").

There are times when all we can do is give a thoughtful word to someone in pain or sorrow. We must comfort the afflicted. When we do, we help others cope with difficulties. When we share our presence and our kind words, we build up the dignity of our brothers and sisters in Christ who often suffer the most when they think they are alone. Let us never leave someone in misery without a loving word of consolation.

As Pope Leo XIV reminds us (see below), our mission as disciples of Jesus Christ is "to build bridges through dialogue and encounter, joining together as one people, always at peace." Whether disturbing or comforting, spiritual works of mercy are necessary activities for ordinary Christians who wish to build bridges and be like Christ. When we perform these acts of charity, we build up the Body of Christ first of all by growing in holiness ourselves and, secondly, by helping our sisters and brothers live authentic spiritual lives.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre  
Archbishop of Louisville



(CNS photo/Pablo Esparza)

## **A Message from Pope Leo XIV: In the one Christ, we are one Building a culture of encounter through dialogue and social friendship**

*Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!*

The Risen Lord always goes before us, even at times when injustice and death seem to prevail. Let us help one another, as I said on the evening of my election, “to build bridges through dialogue and encounter, joining together as one people, always at peace.” This is not something that happens by chance, but is rather an active and continuous interplay of grace and freedom.

Pope Leo XIII, who lived in an age of momentous and disruptive change, sought to promote peace by encouraging social dialogue between capital and labor, technology and human intelligence, and different political cultures and nations.... On such important issues, the Church’s social doctrine is called to provide insights that facilitate dialogue between science and conscience, and thus make an essential contribution to better understanding, hope and peace.

This doctrine helps us to realize that more important than our problems or eventual solutions is the way we approach them, guided by criteria of discernment, sound ethical principles and openness to God's grace.

[We] have the opportunity to show that the Church's social doctrine, with its specific anthropological approach, seeks to encourage genuine engagement with social issues. It does not claim to possess a monopoly on truth, either in its analysis of problems or its proposal of concrete solutions. Where social questions are concerned, knowing how best to approach them is more important than providing immediate responses to why things happen or how to deal with them. The aim is to learn how to confront problems, for these are always different, since every generation is new, and faces new challenges, dreams and questions.

This is a fundamental aspect of our attempts to build a "culture of encounter" through dialogue and social friendship. For many of our contemporaries, the words "dialogue" and "doctrine" can seem incompatible. Perhaps when we hear the word "doctrine," we tend to think of a set of ideas belonging to a religion. The word itself makes us feel less disposed to reflect, call things into question or seek new alternatives.

In the case of the Church's social doctrine, we need to make clear that the word "doctrine" has another, more positive meaning, without which dialogue itself would be meaningless. "Doctrine" can be a synonym of "science," "discipline" and "knowledge." Understood in this way, doctrine appears as the product of research, and hence of hypotheses, discussions, progress and setbacks, all aimed at conveying a reliable, organized and systematic body of knowledge about a given issue. Consequently, a doctrine is not the same as an opinion, but is rather a common, collective and even multidisciplinary pursuit of truth.

"Indoctrination" is immoral. It stifles critical judgement and undermines the sacred freedom of conscience, even if erroneous. It resists new notions and rejects movement, change or the evolution of ideas in the face of new problems. "Doctrine," on the other hand, as a serious, serene and rigorous discourse, aims to teach us primarily how to approach problems and, even more importantly, how to approach people. It also helps us to make prudential judgements when confronted with challenges. Seriousness, rigour and serenity are what we must learn from every doctrine, including the Church's social doctrine.

In the context of the ongoing digital revolution, we must rediscover, emphasize and cultivate our duty to train others in critical thinking, countering temptations to the

contrary, which can also be found in ecclesial circles. There is so little dialogue around us; shouting often replaces it, not infrequently in the form of fake news and irrational arguments proposed by a few loud voices. Deeper reflection and study are essential, as well as a commitment to encounter and listen to the poor, who are a treasure for the Church and for humanity. Their viewpoints, though often disregarded, are vital if we are to see the world through God's eyes. Those born and raised far from the centers of power should not merely be taught the Church's social doctrine; they should also be recognized as carrying it forward and putting it into practice. Individuals committed to the betterment of society, popular movements and the various Catholic workers' groups are an expression of those existential peripheries where hope endures and springs anew. I urge you to let the voice of the poor be heard.

Dear friends, as the Second Vatican Council states, "in every age, the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if she is to carry out her task. In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever-recurring questions which people ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other" ([\*Gaudium et Spes\*, 4](#)).

I invite you, then, to participate actively and creatively in this discernment process, and thus contribute, with all of God's people, to the development of the Church's social doctrine in this age of significant social changes, listening to everyone and engaging in dialogue with all. In our day, there is a widespread thirst for justice, a desire for authentic fatherhood and motherhood, a profound longing for spirituality, especially among young people and the marginalized, who do not always find effective means of making their needs known. There is a growing demand for the Church's social doctrine, to which we need to respond.

I thank all of you for your commitment and for your prayers for my ministry, and I cordially bless you and your families, and all that you do. Thank you.

*(Adapted from Pope Leo XIV's First Address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation (CAP) on May 17, 2025.)*

## **My Prayer for You**

*Please join me in Reflecting prayerfully on these words from the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, 4):*

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.