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|  | **Taking Care of Business:**  **Housekeeping and Introductions** | | |
| What’s the Point? | In this class we will (re)introduce the teens to one another, their table team leaders and the basic concept of Catholic teachings on Social Justice, as well as identifying specific ways in which our parish as a whole works for justice. | | |
| **Background Information** | ***Reference***   * *CCC: ¶* *1881*, *1928, 1929 – 1942 (Section 3)*   + *All of chapter 2 speaks about us and society as a whole, with section 3 specifically on Social Justice.* * NAB : *Gen 1,2;* *Exodus 22:20-24; Ps 34:6-18; Ps 41:1-3; Ps 72:1-19; Ps 103:6-18; Ps 146:2-10; Prv 21:3; Prv 22:22-23; Is 61:1-2; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 6:8; Mt 11:2-6; Mt 15:32; Mt* *25:40 Luke 1:51-55; Acts 2:43-47; Acts 4:32-35; Rom 12:9-18; James 1:17-27; 1 Pt 4:7-11, just to name a few.*   This year we will tackle the big-ticket in the world moral items by examining social ills, their causes, the solutions the Church offers, as well as our role in them. All of this falls under the umbrella of what is known as Catholic Social Teaching. These are not really separate teachings but the amalgamation of all of our teachings focused on specific long-term issues; we have only recently begun speaking of them as a thing.  Catholic Social Teaching really stems from two sources: *Scripture* (with its moral imperative) and *Moral Theology* (with its basic rules for how to think about living the moral imperative) but its core it is based in the crucial idea that all life is sacred, especially human life. This drives all that we do when thinking about how to act, something we explore in Year 3. The authority of Scripture speaks for itself, but it does not speak specifically to many moral situations. Moral Theology is based in the fact that we need to act responsibly, following God’s plan (the Ten Commandments) and also act on a larger scale (the Beatitudes). We have a collective attitude and responsibility as well an internal, individual one.  In Year 3 we stress attitude; moral thinking begins with how we think of ourselves and how we view others. The same is true of Social Justice, meaning that those who have missed the morality catechesis of Year 3 can still be taught the importance of attitude. Still, the concept of Justice, or even the movement from personal morality to social justice may be difficult for some, as we see the word ‘justice’ bandied about, with the usual meaning that “*I get what I want*” or that “*I get vengeance*” but that is usually how human “justice” plays out. *True Justice* (or God’s Justice if we want to think about it in those terms) is different in that *everyone get what we each need and deserve*, not necessarily what we *want*. When the psalmists prays for justice or speak of God’s justice it is a reciprocal justice where because one has followed God (or will begin to follow God again) the Covenant agreement calls for God to provide for all one’s needs as he promised he would do. It is even different, *waaay* different, than a sense of “fairness”.  Our attitude and thinking about Justice come from the agreement we have with God (the Sinai Covenant) and because of our life in the Son (the New Covenant). We should think and act a certain way and we can utterly rely on God to think and act a certain way. By that we mean we can rely on the promises of God and Jesus when we participate in the Kingdom. Beyond just the basic, personal moral mandate we also have a mandate (as the Body of Christ) to take that to the larger world, to evangelize, to preach the ‘gospel’ (the ‘good news’) especially to the marginalized and the poor because it is a message of justice and mercy. Because of this Covenant and its emphasis on the sacredness of human life, we say to the World that everyone is not evil, everyone is not oppressive, everyone is not greedy, everyone is not selfish, that the kingdom of God is a place of equality, mercy, charity, and justice. We can see it in the Early Church where “*There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.*” (*Acts* 4:34-35)  By the very fact that God creates them, all people have human dignity and the rights guaranteed thereby. We must seek, nay we are compelled to seek, God’s ‘insurance coverage’ for all who live, and indeed all of Creation. Think of it this way: our job is to take the redemption and salvation given to the world through Christ’s death and to us through the virtue and blessing of our baptism, and spread it out to as many people as we possibly can. If we want the whole world to come to Christ (which incidentally we should), then we need to work tirelessly for those things which will achieve that goal. We must, as we talked about in Year 3, *think like God*. Fortunately, by virtue of our creation and our baptism *we can*. This is the development of conscience. We believe that Christ’s glory affects not just us Catholics, not just those baptized, but everyone by virtue of the fact that they have been created by God. We work for our own salvation by working for the salvation of others (cf. *Dt* 15:11; *Mt* 25:41-45; *2 Tim* 2:15; *1 Cor* 9:19-27; *just to name a few*)  **Introduction to Moral Theology**  As the systematic and somewhat more official line of thinking, Moral Theology tends to be advanced through official statements of doctrine, such as papal encyclicals and most recently through the documents of Vatican II. Though its pronouncements come from the magisterium, it is based in Scripture and Tradition, with approval granted by the Magisterium. It has a two-fold approach, basically dealing first with the moral actions and secondly with the ‘ends’, the direction toward which moral actions are directed, that is to say, the *purpose* of these moral actions. It focuses on the aspect of free-will and conscience, and the best ends of those free actions, which are free because they are guided by God. Once again we stress that free actions are those which follow God, because all else is sin and therefore leads to slavery and not freedom – we are technically only free when we do the right thing…after that it is only slavery.  Thomas Aquinas gives us the purpose for moral theology: “*Man was made after the image of God, by his intellect, his free will, and a certain power to act of his own accord. Hence, after we have spoken of the pattern, viz. of God, and of those things which proceeded from His Divine power according to His will, we must now turn our attention to His image, that is, man, inasmuch as he also is the principle for his actions in virtue of his free will and his power over his own actions.*” (*Summa Theologica*)  Okay, so what does all that have to do with Social Justice? We are free to the level that we are a reflection (image) of God, and God, through our imitation of Him and His true freedom, is the reason we are able to overcome our natural propensity to sin. So the nature of Moral Theology is the study of right actions in terms of what God has revealed to us. What God has revealed to us is our need to “*feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned*,” to “*announce a year of favor from our God*,” to “*welcome the stranger and the immigrant*” and to “*look after the widow and the orphaned*.” In other words work to bring about the Kingdom of God. But these singular acts can overwhelm us; the more we do the more evil we seem to see. It is therefore our duty to attack the causes of these evils, and hopefully alleviate suffering by removing its root causes. You all recall the adage “*give a man a fish and he eats for a day but teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*” (Anne Isabella Ritchie) This is Social Justice: we work with Charity meeting not just the immediate needs but also the long-term needs.  The problems we address in working on Social Justice issues are not new; Social Justice was not suddenly introduced with Vatican II in the nineteen-sixties. These problems have long been addressed by Catholic thinkers and popes. We can see an increased interest in specific issues from a long list of encyclicals and documents in the past two centuries but we find evidence back to the earliest days of the Church. Justin Martyr addresses it in the 2nd century. There is a great example of the addressing of these issues by St. Thomas More in his book *Utopia*. The first book contains a direct and biting satire against human thinking and laws, and even points to the myriad problems resulting from globalization, 400 years before the nineteen-eighties:  “*For if you suffer your people to be ill-educated, and their manners to be corrupted from their infancy, and then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them, what else is to be concluded from this, but that you first make thieves and then punish them.*” “*Instead of inflicting these horrible punishments, it would be far more to the point to provide everyone with some means of livelihood, so that nobody is under the frightful necessity of becoming first a thief and then a corpse.*” (Thomas More, *Utopia*; quotes are actually reversed in order by me for specific continuity)  Social Justice is not some modern off-shoot of some ‘liberal agenda’ within the Church, but is an important part of the sacramental life of the Church. “*As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word*” (Pope Benedict XVI, *DEUS CARITAS EST*, 22)  Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton, California former head of the USCCB justice-and-peace committee puts it this way, “We serve people *because we are Catholic*, not because they are Catholic!” | | |
| Materials Needed | * Bags of candy (one per table) * Construction paper, glue and markers * Church bulletins (one per table) * Tape (for the * 3 colors of index cards, such as red, yellow, and blue. * PowerPoint * Computer * Overhead projector | | |
| **Attention Grabber** | **None** **(3 min)** | | |
| ***Get to Know You Activity (3 min; 10 min)***   1. ***Welcome Candy***   Announce that every table will receive a different bag of candy and that everyone may pass the bag and help themselves to the candy, making sure to leave some for others in the group. If they see something that they like better at another table, they may get up and make a trade.  **They have 3 min. to do the above, and because in the chaos we “forgot to start with prayer” could they please wait to eat the candy until after the large group prays. They must save their wrappers**.   1. ***Get to Know You***   Table leaders announce that each teen is to state name and tell something about themselves for every piece of candy taken. For older teens, more familiar with one another, ask them to insert a lie in the statements and the rest of the group has to figure out which statement is a lie.   1. ***Scripture and Justice Timeline Activity***   <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/campus-ministry/tools-for-action/upload/Scripture-and-Justice-Timeline-Activity-Statements-and-Answer-Key.pdf> | | |
| **Outline** | **Prayer**: | *Psalm 51:11-17; See below.* | |
| **Presentation**: | *PowerPoint.* | |
| **Activity**: | *Get To Know You* | |
| **Table Discussion**: | *Questions*. | |
| **Post Discussion:** | * *Social Justice Recycling Activity*. * *Take a Step Activity* | |
| **Closing Prayer**: | * *Group Prayer/Petitions.* * *Maximilian Kolbe intercessions.* | |
| **Prayer** | **Introductory Prayer:** (**2 min,** after candle is lit…**)**    ***Psalm 51:11-17***  *Turn away your face from my sins; blot out all my iniquities.*  *A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit.*  *Do not drive me from before your face, nor take from me your holy spirit.*  *Restore to me the gladness of your salvation; uphold me with a willing spirit.*  *I will teach the wicked your ways, that sinners may return to you.*  *Rescue me from violent bloodshed, God, my saving God,*  *and my tongue will sing joyfully of your justice.*  *Lord, you will open my lips; and my mouth will proclaim your praise.*  *Father in Heaven, be with us again this year as we seek to learn Your will for us and for Your Church. Grant us an open heart and a willing spirit to answer the call to charity to all. Give us again the strength of your grace that we might teach transgressors your ways and sinners might return to you. Let us praise you will everything we are and everything we do. Amen.* | | |
| **Pre-discussion Presentation** | Presentation (15 min) | | |
|  | On the 4th of September, Pope Francis officially acknowledged that Mother Teresa of Calcutta<*ask if anyone has heard of her*> was in Heaven by adding her to the Canon of Saints. By this canonization, the Church holds up her life and work for our edification and to challenge us to live and think as she did.  “*Mother Teresa, in all aspects of her life, was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her welcome and defense of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded. She was committed to defending life, ceaselessly proclaiming that “the unborn are the weakest, the smallest, the most vulnerable”. She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity; she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime of poverty they created. For Mother Teresa, mercy was the “salt” which gave flavor to her work, it was the “light” which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering*.” (Homily of Pope Francis and Canonization of Mother Teresa)  Back on the 14th of August we celebrated the feast of St. Maximilan Kolbe <*ask if anyone has heard of him*>. For those of you who do not know who he is (notice how I say ‘is’ – that whole communion of saints thing…remember?), Maximilan, was an outspoken priest in Poland who had to move through some prejudices against Jews to see the true message of Jesus and his calling as a priest. Because of his very vocal calls for justice he was eventually arrested by the Nazis and imprisoned at a concentration camp. When a prisoner escaped the leader of the camp singled out other prisoners to be killed in retribution. One of the men, a Jew, had a family. Maximilan offered his life instead. At his canonization that man and all his family were there.  That one simple act had far reaching consequences, but it was the result of a mindset which sought God’s justice for all, just manifested in a single action.  That is what we will be looking into this year – what simple acts are required of us to change the world and how do we need to view others in the world such that God’s will and love can come to everyone.  Most of you should be able to recall from last year when we spoke about how we were to think and act in the world we talked about the ‘consistent ethic of life’, which basically means that God created it we therefore must respect and fight for it in all of its forms consistently and across the board. There are no ridged rules but forms of thinking, our attitude toward these things. We talk about thinking like God thinks, and therefore loving as God loves.  We can see how important that is when we deal with one another and how we act, but we are also called to see what that means when we look outward to the broader world.  What are some of the BIG problems in our country today (*ASK*)? What are some of the BIG problems in our world today (*ASK*)?  Why are these things problems (*ASK*)? How much can be accounted to how we think and act, as individuals (*ASK*)…as a nation (*ASK*)…as a Church (*ASK*)?  Social Justice is the term we use to talk about these and other problems. Very simply put, Social Justice is defined as the providing by society of all that people need because they are children of God, and the efforts necessary to insure that society does that.  <http://old.usccb.org/campus/teaching-feet.shtml>  NEWER:  <http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/upload/Two-Feet-of-Love-in-Action-2-page-handout.pdf>  <http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/upload/two-feet-brochure.pdf>  <http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/upload/Two-Feet-of-Love-in-Action-Facilitator-s-Guide.pdf>  **From USCCB:**  **Social Justice** "*concerns the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions*" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,* no. 201). We step with this foot when we work to address the *root causes* of problems facing our communities by advocating for just public policies and helping to change the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice at home and around the world.  **Charitable Works** are our "*response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc*." (*Deus Caritas Est,* no. 31). We step with the Charitable Works foot when we work to aid or assist others both locally and globally to meet their immediate, short-term needs. Examples include engaging in direct service or providing food, clothing, shelter, or monetary assistance to help those in need.  *Show the Two Feet poster and talk to it for a minute.*  <http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/stack-of-the-deck.cfm> | | |
| **Activity / Table Talk** | Table Discussion (35 min) | | |
|  | All:   1. What were some things that happened over the summer which you heard the Church speak out on? | |
| Post-Discussion Activity | ***Social Justice Recycling Activity* (0 min).** | | |
|  | After the introduction of the idea of social justice, ask the groups to use the wrappers that they have saved to do the following:   1. Discuss ways that our parish provides for the rights and needs of others. (You may use the bulletin for ideas the ministry listing on back is helpful). 2. As a group, decide on a symbol that represents at least one way that our parish provides for the needs of others. Glue the wrappers to the construction paper and write a statement or title on the paper. Designate someone to share the result with the large group, if time. Display the symbols on the bulletin board strips in the auditorium.   **Take a Step: Illustration of Advantages, Disadvantages and Factors Leading to Poverty**  **Instructions for the facilitator:**  This is an example of an effort to help participants reflect on the "unequal playing field" that benefits some while making it more likely that others will be left behind.  What you will need:   * tape * 3 colors of index cards, such as red, yellow, and blue. There should be more yellow (or whatever color you are substituting for yellow) cards than any other color and only a few blue (or the substitution) cards. For example, if there are 20 participants, have 2 blue cards, 15 yellow, and 3 red.**[[1]](http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/take-a-step-activity.cfm" \l "_edn1" \o ")**   Place a piece of tape on the floor in the center of a large room. Then ask participants to line up shoulder‐to‐shoulder across the room. The participants in the middle of the line should be standing on the taped line on the floor so that the group is shoulder‐to‐shoulder in a line across the center of the room. Ask participants to listen carefully and to follow the instructions given.  For a shorter version (ideal if pressed for time, or if in a small room), only read the prompts with “**\***” in front of them.  **Instructions for participants:**  Announce the following:  If you have a blue card you grew up speaking English as your first language—take two steps forward. If you have a yellow card you grew up speaking English as a second language, but eventually learned English well—take one step forward. If you have a red card you never really learned English until you were an adult—take one step backwards.  **\***If you have a yellow card your family owned a car when you were growing up—take one step forward. If you have a blue card your family owned two or more cars simultaneously—take two steps forward. If you have a red card your family didn't own a car and you were dependent on public transportation or rides from others—take a step back.  If you have a red card you had to go through winters without heat and summers without air conditioning—take a step back. If you have a blue or yellow card you did have these things—take a step forward.  If you have a blue or yellow card you had your own bed growing up and didn't have to share with your siblings or parents—take a step forward.  If you have a blue card you were able to travel on an airplane as a child to go on a trip, see new places, visit relatives, etc.—take one step forward.  **\***If you have a red card you lived in a conflict zone—take three steps back. If you have a yellow card you sometimes had to worry about your safety growing up—take one step back. If you have a blue card you never had to worry about safety growing up—take a step forward.  **\***If you have a yellow or blue card you had health insurance and access to a doctor or hospital if needed when you were growing up—take a step forward. If you have a red card you didn't have these things—take a step back.  If you have a blue or yellow card you breathed clean air growing up—take a step forward. If you have a red card you lived, played, and went to school in a place where the air was very polluted—take a step back.  Every fourth person with a red card, you or your parent was disabled—take a step back.  **\***If you have a blue or yellow card you were able to go to school every day as a child and had a decent education growing up—take a step forward.  **\***If you have a blue card you were also able to go to a four-year college—take two steps forward. If you have a yellow card, you went to technical school or perhaps received your associate's degree from a community college. Take a half a step forward. If you have a red card, you did not have any further education after graduating from high school. Take one step back.  **\***If you have a red card and are standing to the left of the middle line, take another step back. You didn't receive a good education in grade school or high school. You may have lived in an area with a failing school system, or your school may have had very limited resources and students did not have access to the materials or education needed to succeed—take another step back. Or, perhaps you did not have regular access to education because of money, sickness, or another reason at some point in your life.  \*If you have a red card your family didn't have access to a phone, or television when you were growing up—take one step back.  If you have a blue or yellow card you always had access to a computer and the internet when you needed it—take two steps forward. If you have a red card you didn't have this access—take a step back.  Every fifth person with a red card you or your family members have been denied the opportunity to vote despite being of voting age—take a step back.  **\***If you have a yellow or blue card you always knew where you next meal would come from—take a step forward. If you have a red card you sometimes had to skip meals because your family didn't have enough money—take a step back.  If you have a red card and are standing to the right of the middle line, the community where you grew up experienced severe drought which limited your access to food, or flooding which destroyed homes—take a step back.  Every fourth person with a red card, your family migrated as a result of poverty or conflict—take two steps back.  If you have a blue or yellow card you went on vacation growing up—meaning that you went somewhere new and enjoyed or learned about another place or culture—take one step forward.  **\***If you have a red card you were homeless as a child or had to live with relatives, another family, or in a shelter—take three steps back.  **\***If you have a blue card you had a bank account, savings account, or some other financial savings created for you as a child—take two steps forward. If you have a yellow card your family saved some money for you in a college fund—take one step forward.  If you have a red card your family did not have a checking account or paid cash for large and small purchases—take three steps back.  **\***If you have a red card your family was affected by high levels of debt growing up, such as credit card debt, difficulty making mortgage payments, or fear of (or actual) foreclosure on a home—take two steps back.  **\***If you have a blue or yellow card you made visits to the public library to check out books, borrowed or bought books from elsewhere, or had a habit of reading regularly as a child—take two steps forward.  If you have a blue card you had a stable family and grew up with both parents present—take two steps forward. If you have a yellow card you had one parent present, but a stable and loving home life—take one step forward.  **\***If you have a red card you grew up in a poor community where industrial pollution from factories or chemical plants caused sickness or disease in your community—take one step back.  Now take a look at where you are in relationship to each other. Now go back to your tables.  ***Discussion Questions:***   1. What thoughts or reactions do you have to this activity? What surprised you? 2. Did your perspective about your own or others' privilege (or lack of) change as a result of the activity? 3. Which "step backwards" statements were most memorable for you? Why? 4. How might some of the "step backwards" experiences be connected to poverty? 5. If you were someone who mostly stepped forward rather than backward, what responsibilities go along with the privileges you have received? 6. If you mostly stepped forward during this activity, how did you feel while moving ahead of the pack? 7. If you mostly stepped backward during this activity, how did you feel about slipping behind the pack? 8. Does this activity help you to identify some of the "root causes" of poverty? Which ones? 9. Which causes of poverty are missing from this activity?     **[[1]](http://www.usccb.org/about/justice-peace-and-human-development/take-a-step-activity.cfm" \l "_ednref1" \o ")** The suggested proportion of the cards of each color are based on the U.S. Census Bureau, [**2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates**](javascript:showDisclaimer('http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_DP03&prodType=table',2200);). . . , which estimates that 10.5% of families in the U.S. make $150,000 or more per year (the blue cards), 72.1% of families make $25,000-$150,000 per year (the yellow cards), and 17.4% of families make less than $25,000 a year (the red cards). | | |
| Closing | **Announcements and Prayer (5 min).** | | |
|  | **Group Prayer**  Maximilan Kolbe intercessions below. | | |
| Reminder | **\*\*\*\* REMEMBER IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING ATTENDANCE!!** This is a legal document! Please, write down on your attendance sheet the name of any teen at your table, whether they are on your roll or not. | | |
| Attachments | **Below:**   * Maximilan Kolbe intercessions * *A letter of St Maximilan Kolbe* * *A succinct Two Feet presentation* | | |

*Monthly Prayer intentions of St Maximilan Kolbe (August 14th)*

January:

That all believers in the one God work to build peace and that religious faith never be used for economic or political goals.

February:

That Christians become more involved in the social and cultural world, serving as leaven for promoting the value and dignity of each person.

March:

That youth recognize in Mary of Nazareth a witness of peace and trust that flow from following God's plan.

April:

For victims of violence, that they not be forgotten, but that the commitment for justice reveal the victory of the resurrection over evil.

May:

That every woman called to motherhood never be left alone in the face of difficulties and may witness with joy to the power of life.

June:

That the great gift of the Eucharist teach everyone to give thanks for all they are and have, and recognize the signs of the Father's mercy and providence.

July:

That the marginalized, the lonely and the abandoned, be welcomed, appreciated and helped to express new signs of hope.

August:

That those hurt by family breakups, may with care from the Church community, experience God's fidelity and tenderness.

September:

That those who work in the mass media and entertainment fields, may be conscious of their responsibilities and be inspired by human and Christian values.

October:

That the Christian people rediscover their own missionary vocation and collaborate in announcing the Gospel to the whole world.

November:

That the souls in Purgatory might sustain us with love and be in turn assisted by our prayers.

December:

That richer nations have the courage to discuss openly their style of living and confront the growing economic disparity between rich and poor nations.

**Supplements and References**

*A letter of St Maximilan Kolbe (August 14th) [*my bold emphasis*-SK]*

I rejoice greatly, dear brother, at the outstanding zeal that drives you to promote the glory of God. It is sad to see how in our times the disease called “indifferentism” is spreading in all its forms, not just among those in the world but also among the members of religious orders. But indeed, since God is worthy of infinite glory, it is our first and most pressing duty to give him such glory as we, in our weakness, can manage – even that we would never, poor exiled creatures that we are, be able to render him such glory as he truly deserves.

**Because God’s glory shines through most brightly in the salvation of the souls that Christ redeemed with his own blood, let it be the chief concern of the apostolic life to bring salvation and an increase in holiness to as many souls as possible. Let me briefly outline the best way to achieve this end – both for the glory of God and for the sanctification of the greatest number**. God, who is infinite knowledge and infinite wisdom, knows perfectly what is to be done to give him glory, and in the clearest way possible makes his will known to us through his vice-gerents on Earth.

**It is obedience and obedience alone that shows us God’s will with certainty**. Of course our superiors may err, but it cannot happen that we, holding fast to our obedience, should be led into error by this. There is only one exception: if the superior commands something that would obviously involve breaking God’s law, however slightly. In that case the superior could not be acting as a faithful interpreter of God’s will.

God himself is the one infinite, wise, holy, and merciful Lord, our Creator and our Father, the beginning and the end, wisdom, power, and love – God is all these. Anything that is apart from God has value only in so far as it is brought back to him, the Founder of all things, the Redeemer of mankind, the final end of all creation. Thus he himself makes his holy will known to us through his vice-gerents on Earth and draws us to himself, **and through us – for so he has willed – draws other souls too**, and unites them to himself with an ever more perfect love.

**See then, brother, the tremendous honor of the position that God in his kindness has placed us in. Through obedience we transcend our own limitations and align ourselves with God’s will, which, with infinite wisdom and prudence, guides us to do what is best. Moreover, as we become filled with the divine will, which no created thing can resist, so we become stronger than all others**.

This is the path of wisdom and prudence, this is the one way by which we can come to give God the highest glory. After all, if there had been another, better way, Christ would certainly have shown it to us, by word and by example. But in fact sacred Scripture wraps up his entire long life in Nazareth with the words *and he was obedient to them* and it shows the rest of his life to have been passed in similar obedience – almost as an instruction to us – by showing how he came down to Earth to do the Father’s will.

Brethren, let us love him above all, our most loving heavenly Father, and let our obedience be a sign of this perfect love, especially when we have to sacrifice our own wills in the process. And as for a book from which to learn how to grow in the love of God, there is no better book than Jesus Christ crucified.

All this we will achieve more easily through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, to whom the most kind God has given the task of dispensing his mercies. There is no doubt that the will of Mary should be the will of God for us. When we dedicate ourselves to him, we become tools in her hands just as she became a tool in his. Let us let her direct us and lead us by the hand. Let us be calm and serene under her guidance: she will foresee all things for us, provide all things, swiftly fulfill our needs both bodily and spiritual, and keep away from us all difficulty and suffering.

