

**Catholic Commentary on the Interfaith Statement,  
“A Time for Leadership and Action”  
by Rev. Gilles Mongeau, S.J.**

Over 1600 years ago, a bishop stood before his congregation one Sunday and said to the people:

Do you want to see Christ’s altar? This altar of stone [in the sanctuary of the church] is holy because of the sacrifice laid upon it. You honour it because it receives Christ’s body; but those who are in themselves Christ’s body you treat with contempt, and when they are perishing, with neglect. This altar you may see lying everywhere, both in lanes and in marketplaces, and you may sacrifice upon it every hour.

The bishop was Saint John Chrysostom, patriarch of Constantinople. He was trying to teach his community what Christians have understood from the very beginning: God does not just relieve the suffering of the poor and the broken, but chooses to become one with them, to live among them as Jesus of Nazareth. God’s saving love is for everyone, but it reaches out to everyone from the midst of those who have been ignored and pushed aside by distorted political and economic choices. We become one with Jesus when, after hearing God’s Word proclaimed and sharing a meal at the altar, we practise Jesus’ compassion for our brothers and sisters. This basic way of seeing the world lies at the heart of every Catholic’s desire for true peace, for an end to poverty, and for the health of our planet.

Men and women of goodwill may suggest different ways to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for ending poverty, to address climate change, or to build peace. Not only do we expect disagreement about how to proceed, we welcome it, since these practical differences can lead to authentic dialogue that aims to find practical solutions now. Christians want to be part of such a dialogue. But when international conversations become paralyzed by posturing, or when the interests of power are seen as more important than the basic needs of our brothers and sisters, then we must speak out. The community of all believers stands up with the victims of violence and war, with the poor and the broken, and with the whole of creation to remind world leaders of their obligations.

The Scriptures often speak of such obligations. The Book of Genesis tells us that the world is God's gift to us and to all living things; the good things of the earth are given for all so that they may flourish. It is a holy thing to work and acquire these goods for our use, but at the same time we are responsible for using them for the good of all, especially those who are unjustly deprived of them. Over and over again, the prophets teach us that human beings must not be enslaved for any reason, political or economic. God's deepest desire is that creation and human beings enjoy God's *shalom*, the peace and wholeness that comes from right relationship with God, with the earth, and with our brothers and sisters.

A new generation of Catholic leaders is coming of age, marked by a profound love for God, especially as God meets us in the Mass. With Saint John Chrysostom, we call these new leaders to take their love for Jesus of Nazareth into the "lanes and the marketplaces" and to enter into genuine relationship with newcomers to our country, with refugees, with the poor, with the homeless – with all those who are pushed aside by flawed and distorted human decisions. It is only when we have a living relationship with all who suffer that we can understand God's call. Once we are in relationship with the suffering, we discover in our hearts and minds the loving zeal that will not be satisfied with half-measures that do not address the genuine causes of their suffering. In the same way, we invite others to contemplate God's love for all creation. God sent his beloved Son, Jesus, to live among us, and gave us in Jesus the gift of the sacraments, where the good things of the earth are taken up into the saving economy of grace.

Catholics celebrate the commitments expressed in the Interfaith Statement, "A Time for Leadership and Action." Common action is the truest expression of our common search for wisdom and compassion. We offer our prayerful support and service to all those leaders and people of goodwill who are genuinely searching for a more just, more peaceful and more ecological future.

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