

# PRAY

Loving God, you made us in your image, able to think and choose. Help us protect the freedom and dignity of others by participating in our government. Amen.

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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# SPiRIT

Donald Vish

## Adventures in Justice

### FATHER JOHN RAUSCH

by Julie Surma

#### "I don't think that's fair."

Father John Rausch remembers standing up in class and saying those words. He was a high school student, observing school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. "Seeing the injustice of not letting those young black students into the high school was a decisive, shaping experience for me," he says.

Fairness still motivates Father Rausch today as a priest working in Appalachia. Here, he stands up for the people and land of Appalachia, seeks justice for its workers and citizens, and works to end and repair damage to the environment.

"As a young man I was looking for adventure," Father Rausch remembers. "When I saw a brochure



with a picture of Glenmary priests riding around in Jeeps, I knew I wanted to be one of them."

Adventure and hundreds of miles on the road fill a typical week for Father Rausch. "On Monday," he says, "I'm going to visit death row inmates and say Mass. On Tuesday I'm holding a prayer service on a mountaintop scheduled for mining. On Wednesday I'm giving a talk about environmental sustainability. And on Friday I'm joining a mobilization against the war."

Father Rausch is one of 60 Glenmary priests and brothers who serve the small towns of Appalachia and the deep South. "Glenmary goes to the small towns, to the forgotten, the neglected, the folks who are not big names. I am imbued with that spirituality," he says.

## SUNDAY GOSPEL

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

### What is Caesar's? What is God's?

**NARRATOR:** The Pharisees went off and plotted how to trap Jesus in what he said. They sent their disciples to him, accompanied by people who sympathized with Herod.

**PHARISEE 1:** Teacher, we know you are a truthful person and teach God's way sincerely. You court no one's favor and do not act out of human respect. Give us

your opinion, then, in this case.

**PHARISEE 2:** Is it lawful to pay tax to the emperor or not?

**NARRATOR:** Jesus recognized their bad faith.

**JESUS:** You, hypocrites, why are you trying to trick me? Show me the coin people use to pay the tax.

**NARRATOR:** They handed him a small Roman coin.

**JESUS:** Whose head is on the coin, and whose inscription?

**PHARISEES:** Caesar's.

**JESUS:** Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's.

Matthew 22.15-21



**“The coal mining practice of mountaintop removal is the most major assault on God’s creation you can imagine. You can read about something or even see a film about it, but to get up on a precipice where they are mining 200 feet below is eye-opening. To feel the blast and the earth rumble is jaw-dropping.”**

**“Jesus said, ‘If you throw a party, don’t invite the rich.’** Instead, he said to invite the poor and the lame and the crippled and the blind. Now that’s what my work is about: inviting people to the table. That is my spirituality, inviting people to the table, making sure everybody has enough in order to be more.”

Father Rausch helps others see and listen to the forgotten and neglected people of Appalachia by giving tours of the region. He has named his tour A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Appalachia.

he sought to protect his property by getting a land surveyor to put up flags around the boundaries.

“But the coal company (International Coal Group, a large company) came in with their bulldozers, went over the boundary, and took 25 feet of his property,” explains Father Rausch. “And he can’t do a darn thing about it. He can get a lawyer, but he has one lawyer and they have ten lawyers. He is left with a legal problem, with legal fees, with their battery of lawyers against his one guy.”

On the last tour, Father Rausch introduced the group to McKinley Sumner of Perry County, KY. Mr. Sumner owns about 40 acres of land that has been in his family for three generations. Knowing the coal company was going to mine the land next to his,

**“When I take people on tour,” Father Rausch continues, “We go to people and say, ‘Tell me your story.’** Talking about what has been done to them empowers a person like Mr. Sumner and strengthens his determination to see justice done.”

The tour also highlights the practice of Mountaintop Removal (MTR). People get to see up-close how MTR decimates the environment and damages local homes with little legal remedy.

For coal mining companies MTR is a cheap way to remove coal that is close to the surface. They use blasting and giant earthmovers to strip away the foliage and dirt, sometimes lowering the mountain by 500 feet to expose the coal. The large equipment pushes the dirt off the mountaintop and into the valleys below, burying the headwaters of streams.

The EPA estimates that over 700 miles of streams in Appalachia have been covered. The real cost of this practice includes increased flooding and mudslides, pollution of water supplies, and the loss of the natural beauty of the mountains. Regardless of the ecological costs, America’s insatiable demand for cheap energy continues.

Students from St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Hanson, MA, answer the question,

**What is the greatest injustice you see around you?**

I believe the biggest injustice is how people treat *special needs kids*. All they want is acceptance and love, not to be made fun of because of their disability. **Dylan**

*Cyber bullying* happens to teens all over the world. It’s hard to prevent because people are afraid that if they tell, it will only get worse. We need to stop this before more teens die. **Sofia**

The biggest injustice is *loneliness*. I think not feeling loved or not having friends is worse than physical pain. Everyone was made by God to be loved, and deserves to find joy in life. **Emma**

The greatest injustice I see is that of young *women being used* for their bodies. They are tricked into doing things because they are falsely told they are loved. But once the guy gets what he wants, he disrespectfully tosses the girl aside. **Chris**

**“It’s the most major assault on God’s creation you can imagine,” says Father Rausch.**

“You can read about something or even see a film about it, but to get up on a precipice where they are mining 200 feet below is eye-opening. To feel the blast and the earth rumble is jaw-dropping.” The blasts are so powerful that foundations of homes, sometimes two miles away, crack.

The tour also visits a health clinic, where a doctor ministers to people without health insurance. It stops at an eco-village powered by solar panels. Last, the tour visits Sarah’s Place, where women coming out of broken relationships can go to learn marketable skills.

“On a cold, blustery day in December we held a prayer service in an area that had been flooded as a result of MTR,” says Father Rausch. “At the end of the service I gave everyone a handful of wildflower seeds, and said, ‘For the sake of God and community, let’s take back the mountain.’ I fully anticipated them flinging their seeds, getting back into their cars, and heading back down the valley where we had coffee and soup for them. But no, instead, they scattered in all directions, very intentionally planting their seeds,

putting one seed here in this cranny, and another one over there. It was a sacred moment. One woman said, ‘I’m sowing my community back.’ What we try to do is replace ugliness with beauty, replace destruction with a hint of the resurrection, to give people hope that another blossom will come.”

For Father Rausch his ministry goes back to fairness. “We can talk about how we are all part of the people of God and that there is the image of God in each person,” he says, “but it just comes down to let’s treat one another right.”

**Father Rausch continues, “Ask somebody, are you happy with the way the world is going? If they say no, then you**

**have to say, okay, what’s the alternative?**

“The gospel is the alternative that invites people to the table, that allows people to have enough so that they can grow to their fullest potential. We can change some of the laws and some of the structures and some of the customs so that everybody is treated fairly.”

## QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Father Rausch give to God?
- 2 What interests Father Rausch about the work of Glenmary priests?
- 3 What does Father Rausch give to Caesar?
- 4 What do citizens owe their governments?
- 5 What do citizens owe one another?

The greatest injustice in the world today is **racism**. The color of your skin, your religion, your race, whether you are tall, short, fat, or skinny shouldn’t matter. What matters is what is in your heart, mind and soul. **Kayla**

One injustice I have been working very closely with is **hunger**. Food should be a right that belongs to every person no matter what. If there is no price on a life, then there shouldn’t be a price on the things it takes to keep that person alive. **Katie**

## Learning-and-Action



Many young people do volunteer service. To make the most of the experience, consider these things before you jump in:

**Respond to a need you are passionate about** Work on a project that means something to you. What issues impact you or your family or friends? What do you see in your school or neighborhood that tugs at your heart? Passion for the issue will equal energy for the work.



**Learn more about the people you will serve** Before you jump into action, learn more about the people and problem from others who know about

it firsthand. It’s natural to feel pity or sadness for someone involved in a painful situation.

But true compassion asks that we feel with someone and let them guide our understanding of what they are going through, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

**Connect with others who are also concerned** Contact established groups that deal with your issue. Don’t overlook the experience of older people. Their wisdom can give you perspective on the pace of real change.



**Do something—Act!** Whatever that action is, be sure it makes use of your particular talents and skills.

# Duties of Catholic Citizens.

In Sunday's gospel Jesus says that we should "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." At first, Jesus' saying seems to separate religion from politics but in fact it tells us to keep up both relationships—to God and to country. Catholics have an obligation to be responsible citizens.

Most of us know that the fourth commandment teaches, "Honor your mother and father." This means we must respect our parents and teachers and the authority and wisdom they have in our lives. This commandment also implies respecting all authority.

We give authority as citizens to those we elect. In turn, we must follow the laws and rules that they make for us. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "God's fourth commandment also enjoins us to honor all who for our good have received authority in society from God" (#2234).

This does not mean we just follow or honor whoever has power in our lives. The people in our government have duties to provide a society that treats each person with dignity.

The Catechism explains that "political authorities are obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person" (#2237). "A government worthy of respect welcomes all citizens to contribute toward the good of society and take part in the political process" (#2239).

Most teens want a say in what they obey. Many parent/teen conflicts arise over differences in how late is late when staying out with friends. We present our case, argue the advantages, and convince our parents of our wisdom and trustworthiness.

Similarly, citizens don't blindly obey the government. We participate

in making and keeping laws. We lobby Congress to promote our interests; we sign petitions and write letters to convince our senators to vote the way we want them to; we organize campaigns and march to the capitol when we believe an unheard cause needs attention. Catholic citizens must help shape the government into an organization that helps to uphold the dignity and basic human rights of each person.

However, the Catholic citizen also must act when the government is not just. The



Catechism states, "The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the gospel.

"Refusing obedience to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience, finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community" (#2242).

Citizens and their legislators must work both to serve the poorest and to serve the common good of all. Catholic social teaching calls us as citizens to measure our society by how the poorest people fare. This principle of Catholic social teaching is called the option for the poor and vulnerable. Our U.S. Bishops wrote in their pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, "In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first."

**It is the duty of citizens to work with civil authority for building up society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom.**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church #2255*

Catholic social teaching also calls us as citizens to work for the common good. In *The Church in the Modern World*, the Second Vatican Council defined the common good as "the sum of conditions of social life which allows social groups and their individual members thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (#26). This means all people not only have rights but duties to one another. The food, clothing, shelter, school, and health care most of us have are basics others' need to thrive, too, both in the U.S. and in other countries.

Poverty can trap people. Malnutrition can stunt brain development. Too little schooling keeps people without ways to earn a livelihood. Sometimes government policies hurt the poorest who have little political voice. Catholic social teaching insists the poorest and most vulnerable are our brothers and sisters who may be insignificant in society but not before God.

## FAITH in ACTION

1 Make

a list of political issues that concern you.

Compare your list with others in your group.

2 What political issues are engaging people in your church, school, or town? How can you get involved? 3 Go to the Network Lobby website and learn how to write a letter to your senator or representative. Go to [networklobby.org](http://networklobby.org), click on 'Advocacy Toolbox.' 4 Organize or join justice groups that are working toward the common good. You can also support such organizations financially. 5 Help organize and run voter registration drives in communities with lower voter turnout. Remind citizens how important their votes really are.