

# Solidarity

## 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'

The Psalms, the Gospels and our faith itself are centred on an inconceivable intimacy between God and **individuals**: Jesus tells us 'even the hairs on your head have all been counted'. With him the person always comes first, not their economic usefulness, their education or their citizenship.

Solidarity is about acting on this priority of individuals over social, economic and political systems. Love is 'the verb of solidarity'.

In our everyday lives, solidarity is steadily being eroded. Increasingly we can live 'in a world of our own', replacing personal contact with recorded messages on the 'phone, self-service ticket machines and checkouts, on-line banking and virtual shopping. Globally, giant corporations and the free movement of capital and people can overwhelm national and local institutions, destroy communities and anonymise individuals. Predictably, the poorest suffer most.



*Our individual lives, our choices and our actions are inextricably linked to those of other people, even those thousands of miles away.*

This raises questions about the equitable production and sharing of the world's resources, notably food. At the time of the Gospels, the link between food and farming was direct and obvious. By contrast, much of our food comes via complex networks of producers, processors and distributors. In many countries, basic problems such as access to land or technology are exacerbated by social inequality and civil unrest. Wages are suppressed by international markets.

*“A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being.”*

Pope Francis June 2013.

Nearly 870 million people of the 7.1 billion people in the world suffer from chronic undernourishment. That's one in eight. Almost all the hungry people live in developing countries, where they make up about 15% of the populations.

Our complicity in this is direct, not hypothetical or just theoretical. We benefit individually and as a nation from the way the system works. On the other hand, small-scale farmers who grow many of the things we use, such as cotton, coffee and sugar, account for over half of the world's hungry people.

An estimated 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty – by the UN definition of living on less than \$1.25 a day (about 76p).

It is not easy to picture 1.2 billion people, let alone see them as individuals in the way that Jesus knows and loves them, and would have us do. Our faith in him demands a practical response: from us, from our country and from the affluent developed world.

*“It is not just a question of giving one's surplus to those in need, but of helping entire peoples presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. .... it requires above all a change of lifestyles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies”.* Blessed Pope John Paul II