

Devotional Common Good

She was almost 40 before she came to know her calling to work for the common good. Agnes Bojaxhiu left her home in Albania to dedicate her life to serving the Lord through the church. Upon becoming a nun, she was sent to a convent school in Calcutta, India. The majority of her students were daughters of wealthy Europeans. She could have stayed safely behind the wall of the Loreto convent teaching others to follow God's call. But she read a challenging scripture in Matthew 25:40, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."* This started Agnes, by then Sister Teresa, on her path to become Mother Teresa, who we all know and admire. She felt a call to work for the common good among the lowest of the common people, the destitute population living on the streets of Calcutta.

Her response seems a far cry from our current culture. Commenting on the many economic and social problems that American society now confronts, a *Newsweek* columnist recently wrote: "We face a choice between a society where people accept modest sacrifices for a common good or a more contentious society where groups selfishly protect their own benefits." As a culture, it seems we are headed more and more in the selfish direction.

The idea of the common good goes back over 2,000 years to the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, before Jesus was even born. The notion of the common good is about having the social systems on which we all depend, work in a manner that benefits all people. Systems like the health care system, a safe system of highways and roads, a just legal system, and other social systems that all of us depend on are envisioned to work equally for the good of all. But without a commitment born out of a love for God, is it likely that this vision could ever be realized? Mother Teresa is a sterling example of the only realistic approach to the common good: listen to God, be transformed by His word and you will find the best way to work for the common good.

There are ample examples of others who have contributed to the common good. Let's take a quick look at two from the Bible.

Moses lived a pretty self-absorbed life before God got hold of him. At 40, from his home in Pharaoh's palace he strutted into the neighborhood of his ancestry intending to bless them with his presence. Instead, he ended up murdering an Egyptian and running for his life. After 40 more years in the desert working as a shepherd, God was able to get his attention. From then on, his life was sacrificed to the common good of the Children of Israel and their escape from Egyptian slavery. Through many dangers and much frustration, he put all his energies into delivering them to the Promised Land and a life of freedom.

But there is no one who did more for the common good than Jesus. He did not consider equality with God something to grasp. He let it go and emptied Himself, gave up all of heaven's glory to be born among livestock in a stall. From the time His ministry began, every moment was lived for the common good. Not just the common good of the culture into which He was born, but for the good of all people everywhere through all time. By sacrificing His life on the cross, our sins were cancelled, and we are pardoned. By His resurrection we know for certain that heaven awaits us if we put our trust in Him. He is our example; He is the one we follow.

So, when we are told in Ephesians 2:10 that we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do, how can we hesitate to follow His example, and the example of others? He has prepared these good works, just for us. We will find our highest fulfillment in them. And He has given us the tools to do what He calls us to do, and to do it for the common good. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 we read, *“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them, there are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”* What a joy to put the Spirit’s investment in us to work for God’s kingdom, for the good of all, just as Jesus our Savior did. Listen to God, be transformed by His word and you will find the best way to work for the common good.