



# Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time November 3, 2013 C

## FAIR TRADE

I am grateful to Mary Kay Kantz for writing this week's column on the issue of Fair Trade. Mary Kay heads up our JustFaith Ministry.

As parishioners shop this Sunday at Ascension's Seventh Annual Holiday Fair Trade Sale, it's worth taking a few minutes to think about what Fair Trade means and why Ascension's support of Fair Trade so fully expresses our commitment to the Gospel.

Let's start by considering Pope Francis' statement that "God is to be encountered in the world today." Not just above the clouds or only in church, but "in the world today." Just where and how is he suggesting we will meet God? Since billions of our Earth's people live in extreme poverty, there's no doubt we can find God dwelling in the midst of deep poverty, hunger, indignity and insecurity. In deserts, jungles, and city slums; on tropical islands regularly visited by devastating storms; on slave plantations and in sweatshops.

In May, 2006, Fr. Eamon encountered God among impoverished coffee-growing families in Guatemala. Hours of arduous travel over mostly unpaved roads took him to the remote mountain villages of Santa Anita, Nueva Alianza, and Comunidad Loma Linda, the three villages where Ascension met the Fair Trade movement.

In Santa Anita, Father met God in the faces of people like Teresa and little Alicia, whose faces you see on the Fair Trade Sale posters around the Ascension campus this week. Teresa, her husband Manuel, and their children are part of the Santa Anita Fair Trade coffee-growers cooperative. Because Fair Trade came to Santa Anita, children like Alicia and her brothers can go to school regularly and do not have to worry that their fathers will have to leave home and travel to the U.S. to earn a living for their families.

Here's how it works: Fair Trade is a system of international commerce that operates among some of the millions of people who lack access to the transportation, communication, education and marketing systems that run the world's economies. Through sustainable and equitable trading partnerships, it attempts to level the playing field so these people can

enter into the world market to earn a livelihood for their families rather than being used and manipulated by powerful outside forces. (Incidentally, note that "Fair Trade" and "free trade" are entirely different concepts.) Fair Trade provides certain guarantees for both sides of these partnerships, including:

**A fair price for products and labor:** Certified national and international Fair Trade federations set base prices for top quality goods. Junk products, cheap piecework, slave labor, starvation wages, and exploitation of children are not tolerated. Prices are better than those offered in conventional markets, so more of the ultimate purchase price stays with the producers, rather than with a plethora of "middlemen."

**Additional safeguards:** Fair Trade contracts enforce safe and healthy working conditions, sustainable agricultural practices, sound environmental standards, and guarantees of education and limited work hours for children.

**Economic empowerment of small-scale producers:** Artisans and farmers who are unable to enter large-scale markets because of poverty, geography, and limited access to transportation and communication are helped to become self-sustaining through participation in cooperative ventures with their neighbors.

**Special assistance:** Fair Trade means equal employment opportunity for men and women, public accountability for business transactions, and financial and technical assistance to producers whenever possible. Micro-loans make business start-ups possible among marginalized growers and artisans in developing countries. For instance, they enable growers to purchase seeds and farm implements to increase and improve crops on their small-scale farms.

**Investment in communities:** In addition to the base Fair Trade price set for products, producer cooperatives receive an extra amount of money called the "social premium" which they spend on community improvements such as schools, clinics, housing and safe water systems. Large-scale FT purchasers enter into long-term trade relationships with Fair Trade producers for the on-going development of healthy families and communities.

Among such purchasers are the ones that supply the Fair Trade products sold the last Sunday of every month at Ascension and at today's Holiday Fair Trade Sale: Catholic Relief Services, Ten Thousand Villages, Higher Grounds Trading Company, Equal Exchange, Canaan Fair Trade, and Divine Chocolate.

Economist Adam Smith famously said, "Every business transaction is a challenge to see that both parties come out fairly." The American Catholic Bishops have said, "We are one human family. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in an interdependent world." Through their international social justice arm known as Catholic Relief Services, our bishops have embraced the concept and practice of Fair Trade. They ask that we, as faithful Catholics, respond by seeking out and buying Fair Trade products whenever we can.

A wonderful array of Fair Trade home and gift items is available to you at this Sunday's Sale in the Parish Hall (8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.). To help you get ready for your Christmas entertaining and gifting, Fair Trade coffee, tea, olive oil and chocolates will be available after all Masses the weekend of December 14-15. Then from January on, Fair Trade coffee, tea, olive oil and (in the cooler months) chocolate can be purchased after all Masses the last Sunday of each month (and the Saturday night before.)

Ascension's JustFaith Community is very grateful for the parish's faithful support of Fair Trade over the past seven years. You are truly making a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters around the world...and encountering God in the process. We look forward to providing you with excellent Fair Trade products today and the weekend of December 14-15 and throughout 2014.

### **Prayers for Fairtrade**

***O Lord,***

***You revealed your Kingdom in parables  
that spoke of simple things -  
yeast in a loaf of a bread,  
a woman sweeping her home.***

***Grant that the simple choices we make -  
what tea to drink, what fruit to eat -  
may honour your Name***

***and reveal your Kingdom present among us.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

***Almighty God,  
we grieve that in Your world,  
despite all the riches You have given us so freely  
selfishness and greed so often rule  
our decisions in trade  
as in so many other areas of our lives.  
Forgive us our participation  
in unjust structures of trade  
and help us to do justice, love kindness  
and walk humbly with you.***

***Almighty God,  
who longs for all your children  
to live together in your peace,  
we thank you for the ways  
in which Fairtrade binds us together  
as we seek to follow your commands.  
Strengthen the bonds of trust and affection  
between us, that together we may do justice, love  
kindness and walk humbly with you.***

Have a blessed week,

*Le Sarah*