

Lost: Exploring Catholic Social Teaching Themes

Network: ABC prime time

Seasons: 6, from 2004 to 2010 (115 episodes)

Creators: J.J. Abrams, Jeff Lieber, Damon Lindelof

The *Lost* series offers opportunities for reflection on some of the main principles of Catholic social teaching as well as on the relationship of faith, spirituality, and moral decisions, decisions that may have social and communal implications and impact.

Synopsis:

Lost is a television series about a group of people brought together on an airline trip from Australia to LA; their plane crashes on a mysterious tropical island somewhere in the South Pacific and they find themselves stranded. Over the course of six seasons, the main characters go through many adventures. Their past lives and their past choices are revealed slowly, and then we witness them change, grow, regress, change again, bond, break apart—and regroup in different ways, even in different realities and through time travels.

The series incorporates elements from both Western and Eastern religions, suggesting that there is “more in heaven and earth than meets the eye.” The characters explore the mysteries of the island but also of the human heart, their own and others. While the plot lines grow more complex and convoluted during the course of the series, several main themes emerge and reverberate in *Lost* that have connections with morality and social ethics. The complexities of adult moral life and the interconnectedness of individual choices with group consequences grow more evident as the series has progressed.

Central Themes:

- The fall of humans reflected in the struggle for power over the island, over nature with all its richness and mystery.
- The arc of sin and redemption through solidarity and commitment to the common good.
- The complexity of moral and ethical decision making in a social context (How one’s decisions impact a larger social group).
- The rights and responsibilities of individuals as they impact the social group they are connected to.
- Multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-belief system solidarity as well as divisiveness.
- Exploring the traditional view of science and reason vs. faith and intuition, and the possibilities of opening up those categories to see a more complex dynamic.
- The complexities of life beyond simple juxtapositions of white/black, light/dark, Eden/civilization, good/evil. *(Continued on next page)*



Catholic Social Teaching Connections:

The Life and Dignity of the Human Person:

The series reveals that behind stereotypes (the Con Man, the Responsible Doctor, the Iraqi Torturer, etc.) there are complex and complicated people who all have a story worth revealing and who all have lives that can have impact on others for good as well as for evil. Even great sinners have opportunities for redemption.



Solidarity and Common Good:

The group marooned on the island soon learn that they must work together because their own survival depends on solidarity. Even loners such as Sawyer begin to work for the common good as they realize the reality of interdependence. Survivors who have the opportunity to leave the island eventually come back to try to help the ones left behind. Some sacrifice their own lives for the good of the group.

Rights and Responsibilities:

The main characters struggle to understand their responsibilities to the group even as they assert their own rights. The complexities of decision making take into account both of these poles and are often explored throughout the series. For example, should a parent allow his own child to escape if it impacts negatively on others?

Stewardship:

Different factions want to control the island and its resources; greed and the lust for power over nature and its mysteries is suggested by the conflict between Ben and Charles Whitmore. The desire for power and control leads to destruction and death.

Other Justice Issues:

- The use of technology and scientific discoveries for the good of the entire human community or for its domination and even destruction is explored.
- One story line looks at the reality of child soldiers in Africa and the aftermath.
- The possibilities of multi-cultural communities is explored.
- The role of faith, the nature of the spiritual realm and its relation to hope for human survival is also explored.

Questions for Discussion:

- What struggles do each of the main characters in *Lost* face to realize their own complexity and dignity? (Take each main character and discuss this question and the questions below in turn.)
- How does each character develop beyond a stereotype?
- In what way is each character a sinner in need of redemption?
- What opportunities for redemption are presented to them?
- What are some of the complexities they face in their own lives as the series progresses?
- What choices are crossroads for them?
- How do their individual choices have reverberations in the different communities that are created, dissolved and recreated in different ways during the course of the series?
- What responsibilities do they take on, and how do these responsibilities expand their own possibilities as humans?
- How do the characters create community among themselves, foster and participate in community and develop solidarity?
- How do the experiences of community and solidarity enhance the characters? Give examples from different story lines and episodes in the series.
- How do the characters begin to define the common good as the story opens?
- Does their definition of the common good shift during the series? How and why?
- What concept of the common good does the series ultimately present? How does this compare/contrast with the Catholic social teaching concept of the common good (“the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment,” *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.*, #26)?
- What threatens their solidarity as the story lines progress? What destroys solidarity in some instances and what revives it?
- What lessons about solidarity do we learn from the series?
- What role does the lust for power and control play in the *Lost* series? How does the lust for power impact the human community and the natural world in the series? What is the lust for power and control doing to real human community and the real natural world today?
- There are many references to Christian elements as well as references to other religions and cultures in *Lost*. What does *Lost* imply about a spiritual reality in human life?
- Does the reality of Evil exist in the world of *Lost*? Does the show suggest ways of dealing with evil?
- What does the series suggest about evil, violence and a moral universe?
- Are there any implications that sacrifice may be necessary for the human community to survive and to find salvation?
- Is objective truth a possibility in *Lost*?
- When is Revelation offered in the series? How is it received?
- What role does spirituality play in the concrete quest for justice in *Lost*? How does respect for the spiritual realm connect to issues of justice and peace in *Lost*, as it does in Catholic social teaching?
- What do you finally take away from *Lost* that has meaning for you?

