

## **Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

What was the point that Jesus was making in his arguments with the Jewish scribes and Pharisees about the way that they observed the law? It seems to me that they were like those who insist on us wearing masks and using QR codes but had forgotten why we are doing those things. It is a danger that we all have of focusing in on the little things and missing the things that are more important.

Today is Social Justice Sunday and the Bishops of Australia have asked us to hear the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor. They have asked us to listen more carefully to what the earth is saying to us about how we can better care for our common home. They are asking us to listen more carefully to those in our community and our world who are most severely affected by the misuse of God's creation.

There are some people today who have power and influence who have their own version of what is true. Truth is replaced with versions of reality that serve an agenda, or interpretations of events that make people less uncomfortable about their attitudes and choices. People, animals, and the earth can be rationalised as commodities to exploit, use, abuse, and discard. The desire to possess, dominate and consume disrupts the

delicate balance and harmony needed to sustain healthy communities and ecosystems.

The Bishops of Australia are inviting us to see the world differently. They would like us to see that all that God has created is connected. They would love us to be able to see our world and all who live upon it as sacraments that speak to us of the God who created them. We are called to live in harmony with our created world and all who live in it. Moses reminds the people of Israel and us today that there is wisdom and understanding in following God's law. Those who have opened and shaped their hearts to God's law of love see, hear, speak, and live the truth of this way of being and acting in the world every day. This contributes to God's Kingdom breaking through in the here and now.

The psalmist encourages people to stand firm in God's truth and to act justly in dealing with people in their daily lives, including their business dealings. God's presence is found in integrated and right relationships with people, characterised by detachment from material gain, especially when it comes at the hurt and expense of others. This psalm highlights an ongoing temptation in our world for people to seek material riches and social advantage as false markers of blessedness and success.

James gets to the heart of things in calling people to listen to the God who dwells within them and to take action to defend those most defenceless and vulnerable as a visible marker of their true identity in Christ. God's goodness never changes and never ends. We are called to embrace and foster this in ourselves, doing our part to come to the aid of all who most need our help. God has created each with purpose and value, just as they are.

Jesus calls out the hypocrisy and self-serving behaviour of anyone, especially leaders, who would seek to absolve themselves from the real work of conversion of heart and life. Hiding behind the details of traditions, rules, and the finer points of external rituals alone is not what is called for in faithfully following Christ. Our beautiful Christian traditions, prayers, liturgies, and rituals point us to the gift and glory of God and God's beloved creation. Our faith is built on who we are following, what we believe, and how we relate to others in Christ. Relationships of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness are direct encounters with God's amazing grace alive and active in our hearts and lives. This is where we are asked to focus, and to live.

I invite you to take the time to search out this year's Social Justice Statement on web. Just type in Social Justice Statement 2021 and you will easily find it. It is a challenging read, but well worth while.