

Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Social Justice Sunday

The parable to which we have just listened can be used as a way of reflecting upon this year's Social Justice Statement issued by the Bishops of Australia. The Statement has been called "Everyone's Business - Developing an inclusive and sustainable economy". Using an everyday example of economic hardship, Jesus teaches how the reign of God is open to all, generous, and especially mindful of those left behind. God provides sufficiently and fairly for each person, all the while attentive to the needs of those who feel excluded and have little hope.

The vivid image of market place and vineyard still resonates. That the employer goes four times during the day to find workers in desperate need speaks of the precarious existence of the day labourer, and a market that fails to serve the whole community.

This Social Justice Statement considers Australia's economic priorities. It draws from the teachings of Pope Francis and his predecessors, highlighting how extreme versions of free-market economics have failed to serve all. Inequality has been growing in Australia. Many have missed out on opportunities to secure stable employment and a just share in income and

wealth – even after 26 years of continuous economic growth.

When it comes to the social justice of the entire economic system, the statement draws on new understandings of human development from economics and social policy that emphasise how the wellbeing of humans and all of creation must be an economy's central purpose.

The Church has been part of a global movement for 'inclusive growth'. It is not just about improving sections of the economy that have failed the poor. It is not about continually picking up people who have fallen through the system and placing them back into a market place that cast them aside in the first place.

The Bishops of Australia are calling for a new approach that prevents exclusion from the outset and, like the owner of the vineyard in our Gospel reading, engages all people as dignified, active contributors to sustainable and inclusive growth.

The parable may seem unfair to us. The owner of the vineyard pays all of the workers one denarius – even those who completed only one hour's work. But the denarius was the basic daily pay of labourers,

sufficient for a living wage, and akin to our notion of a minimum wage. The payment given by the owner recognises the dignity of all, regardless of the hours they worked. The generosity of the owner is shown in how he places the human person, not the prevailing standard of the market, at the centre of his concern.

We see a vineyard in which all are engaged as active contributors to the economic enterprise. We are called to work for an economy that is inclusive and capable of putting the needs of the poor before the wants of the rich. We long to see an alternative to market places that are harsh and inhospitable: we long to see the vineyard, lush and green, sustainable in its growth and inclusive in its economy.

As we have said, Jesus' parable speaks as much to us now as it did to the listeners of his time. The Church does not believe an ideal world is possible on earth. Only God can fully usher in the perfection of His Kingdom. But Christ's promise of that Kingdom calls us to work for just social transformation based on the great commandment to love God and to love our neighbour, especially the most vulnerable (Matthew 22:34–40).

Today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah is a call for the wicked to abandon their wicked ways. It is an invitation for all of us to turn back to God who will take pity on us; to turn back to Our God who is rich in forgiving. This God tells us that his thoughts are not our thoughts, that his ways are not our ways. Jesus has revealed this God to us and he invites us now to see others as God sees them, as unique and precious, and to treat them accordingly. It is an offence in the eyes of God to treat people simply as commodities, to be discarded when no longer commercially profitable. We are called to challenge commonly held assumptions and ways of operating that undermine human dignity and damage the most vulnerable of our neighbours.

I invite you to take a copy of this year's Social Justice Statement. There are a few copies in the foyer. Search for it on the web by typing in "Social Justice Statement 2017". It will be a rewarding challenge to read it all.