

Social Justice Sunday Liturgy Notes

September 29, 2019

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Social Justice Statement 2019–2020

Making it Real: Genuine Human Encounter in our Digital World

Overview:

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement for 2019–20 is titled 'Making it Real: Genuine human encounter in our digital world'.

New digital media offer positive possibilities for encounter and solidarity, however some elements of our digital world may be harmful. These include information overload; social isolation; marginalisation of the vulnerable; consumerism and fake news.

The Statement reminds us that the new digital media cannot be seen as neutral or 'unaffected by any moral considerations'. While many users do not realise it, the core business of social media platforms is to sell advertising and maximise profits. People's personal lives may be reduced to data that is traded for profit or power, and it is used to target and influence us in ways previously unthinkable. Pushing users to more extreme positions and promoting fake news and conspiracy theories sells, but this is at odds with human solidarity.

The Bishops amplify Pope Francis' call to us to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world', with the image of the Good Samaritan as our inspiration. We are called not only to love our neighbour, but to bring the love of God to the new global neighbourhood. The Statement points out that we are called not just to be inhabitants of this new digital world, but active citizens shaping it. All of us – whether we are users, communities, industrial or political leaders – have a role to play in rejecting hatred, divisions and falsehoods. We have a duty to foster a neighbourhood that promotes those human attributes and social values that lend themselves to genuine human encounter – love, understanding, beauty, goodness, truth and trustworthiness, joy and hope.

For the Parish Bulletin:

We celebrate Social Justice Sunday on 29 September. This year, the Australian Bishops' Social Justice Statement is titled: 'Making it Real: Genuine human encounter in our digital world'. It shares Pope Francis' challenge to us to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world'. It points out that we are called not just to be inhabitants of this world, but active citizens shaping it.

For further details about the Social Justice Statement, visit the Office for Social Justice website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au) or call (02) 8306 3499. Order the Statement online at: bit.ly/socialjusticeshop Follow us on Facebook: @socialjusticeACBC or Twitter: @JusticeCatholic

Liturgy Notes

The following notes may be of use to link the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time with Social Justice Sunday, 29 September, 2019.

Welcome

Today is Social Justice Sunday. The Australian Catholic Bishops have published a Social Justice Statement, titled: ***Making it Real: Genuine human encounter in our digital world.***

The Statement affirms the positive possibilities for encounter and solidarity offered by new digital media, while warning of those elements of our digital world that may be harmful. These include information overload; social isolation; marginalisation of the vulnerable; consumerism and fake news. Pope Francis challenges to us to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world' actively shaping it.

Reflective Prayer

God of perfect peace,
Violence and cruelty can have no part with you.
May those who are peace with one another
hold fast to the good will that unites them;
may those who are enemies forget their hatred and be healed.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Readings

Our readings this Sunday confront us with inequality and divisions in the world. Then – and now - those who are rich and powerful are warned that God will raise up, protect, and uphold the poor and excluded, bringing about a reversal of fortunes. Things are not what they seem. Today, in our digital world, what appear on the surface to be perfect lives can belie a different reality. The digital platforms themselves may appear to be free and neutral, but they are not. The digital world that connects us as never before is also marked by a divide.

The readings call us to reach out in solidarity, respecting, including and caring for our neighbours, whether face to face or in the digital world. Are our online actions characterised by faith and love, patience and gentleness? Do we stand up for the truth when we encounter hate groups, cyberbullying or 'fake news' online?

Amos 6:1, 4-7

Amos describes the lavish lifestyle of the rich and famous of his day. Their lives appear idyllic, but Amos warns that their disregard for the poor and marginalised will have consequences. Social media profiles, posts and platforms can be superficial and deceptive

too. Whether in the digital world, or face to face encounters, we must be genuine and care about 'the ruin of Joseph'.

Ps 145: 7-10

The psalm assures those who are disadvantaged or marginalised of God's love and protection. Today, 'real life' disadvantage and marginalisation are echoed and amplified in the digital world. We can be instruments of God's loving presence raising up, loving, protecting and upholding our sisters and brothers in the digital world too.

1 Timothy 6:11- 16

Timothy encourages us to be filled with faith and love, to be patient and gentle, and to stand up boldly for the truth in front of others. These same qualities and actions are needed in our digital world today. We can stand in solidarity with victims of cyberbullying and speak truth in the face of hate or misinformation.

Luke 16:19-31

Luke presents the divide between the rich man and Lazarus as an injustice that sees the rich man condemned to hell. Abraham, who has gone before us in faith, comforts Lazarus. We should not allow the good things available to us to divide us from our sisters and brothers. Can we make our digital world a place of connection and genuine human encounter?

Reflection on the readings / Homily Notes

The central message of this year's Social Justice Statement is that social media have enormous capacity for good if well used, but also great potential for harm when they are misused. The most important questions we should ask about them are not technical but concern the human beings who use them, control them and profit from them. Through social media we can communicate instantly with distant family members and friends. We can also stay in daily touch with a wide group of friends. But through them we can also express our contempt and hatred from a safe distance, and be hurt by others who attack us. Through social media, too, we can associate and organise with others to help change the world for the better. But they can also be used to enrich their owners and to entrench injustice by concealing reality. They can help to enhance us as human beings and so build a more human society, or to diminish us in a more unjust world.

The readings in the liturgy for Social Justice Sunday address these same possibilities for good or evil in the ways we use wealth. We can use wealth to relieve poverty and to build a community in which people respect and look out for one another, or we can amass, spend or hoard it without any thought for other people and their needs. Wealth can prevent us from noticing the suffering and needs of people who are poor. We then neglect our responsibility to them. Instead we keep away from them and blame them for their own condition. Thinking about our attitudes to wealth can open our eyes to the same possibilities for better and for worse in the use of social media.

Amos, writing in a time of crisis before the Assyrians conquered and exiled the Israelites, criticises very wealthy people with an extravagant and selfish life style built on the exploitation of the poor. In the passage we read today Amos mocks people who flaunted their wealth, unaware of how precarious their world was and of the disaster that was coming. Their lack of attention to the world around them and to their own place in it would lead to their destruction. The mission of prophets like Amos was to make people aware of the reality of their lives and world and to encourage them to live with respect. Social Justice Statements have the same mission as the prophets to draw attention to the possibilities and abuses in our world. This year's statement points out the bad and the good possibilities of social media, and the risks entailed in not being reflective about them.

The situation which Jesus addressed in the story of the rich man and Lazarus was very similar. In Luke's Gospel the background of the story is the increasing hostility by Jewish religious groups to Jesus and his message. They were satisfied with their position as God's chosen people and saw their wealth as a reward for their faithfulness. After Jesus tells a story suggesting both that their wealth is tainted and that God's favour will depend on how they use it, they mock him. Jesus responds to them by telling the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

In the story the rich man, like the people whom Amos criticizes, lives extravagantly. He does not even notice Lazarus, who crawls on the ground competing with the dogs for scraps. But when Lazarus dies the rich man finds that their positions are reversed. Lazarus is with Abraham while he is tormented in Hades. In the rest of the story the rich man is forced to confront reality. Lazarus is not a servant to whom he can give orders, his wealth can no longer help him, and nothing will persuade people like him to seek help by attending to Jesus' message.

This Gospel story speaks powerfully to us about social media. We can become so used to it, even addicted to it, that we can ignore its threat to us and the way in which it impoverishes our understanding of ourselves and our world. It can make us divide our world into friends whom we like and others to whom we can respond arrogantly or hurtfully. It can also make us blind to the way in which large companies make huge profits by selling our personal data to people who then manipulate us. We might shrug our shoulders when we see social media being used to manipulate elections. Like the rich man, we can live happily ignorant of the kind of persons we are becoming and of the bitter society we are helping shape. Then we easily forget that Jesus rose from the dead to help us live attentively and fully.

The Letter of Timothy recommends attentive living. In handling money, as in handling social media, goodness, hospitality, self-control, generosity and love are the compasses that guide our way. Attentiveness to our hearts and to the network of relationships that shape our world will keep our lives and our world safe. As followers of Jesus we gain the self-knowledge and attentiveness that help us live a richer life through following Jesus' prayerful way.

(Our thanks to Andrew Hamilton SJ for this reflection on the readings)

Prayers of the Faithful

The following intercessions are offered for incorporation in your Prayers of the Faithful.

Celebrant: Let us pray to the Creator of all that is that we will be inspired by Jesus' example of respect and inclusion to foster genuine human encounter in our face to face interactions and in our digital world.

For our political leaders, that they may ensure sound governance of our digital world, protecting the rights of all people and fostering the common good.

Let us pray to the Lord: **R. Lord hear our prayer**

For all people who are subjected to misogynistic, racial or religious vilification, cyberbullying, or digital exclusion, that they may find respect, support, and inclusion.

Let us pray to the Lord: **R. Lord hear our prayer**

For our community of faith and all people of good will, that we will foster genuine human encounter through our participation in the digital world.

Let us pray to the Lord: **R. Lord hear our prayer**

Celebrant: Hear the prayers of your people, merciful God, and in your loving kindness, grant us all that we need to remain faithful to you. We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

Suggested Music

All are Welcome (Haugen) [CWBII 535]

A New Heart for a New World (Watts/O'Brien) [AOVI 158, CWBII 477, GA 438]

Bread of life, Hope for the World (Farrell) [AOVI 164, CWBII 459, GA 199]

Christ, Be Our Light (Farrell) [AOVII 3, CWBII 540, GA 404]

Come As You Are (Brown) [AOV 31, GA 212]

Community of Christ (Murray)

Gather Us in (Haugen) [AOV 12, CWBII 501, GA 526]

God of Day and God of Darkness (Haugen) [AOV 56, CWBII 498, GA 541]

Harvest of Justice (Haas) [AOVII 55]

Shelter Me, O God (Hurd) [AOV 140, GA 230]

The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor (St Louis Jesuits) [CWBII 618, GA 36]

We Are Called (Haas) [AOVII 60, CWBII 476, GA 514]

You Are Mine (Haas) [AOVII 2, CWBII 516]

KEY

AOV = As One Voice (1992)

AOVII = As One Voice (1996)

CWBII = Catholic Worship Book (2016)

GA = Gather Australia (1995)

Suggestion: The following prayer of Pope Francis, issued with the Statement as a prayer card, could be given to parishioners or printed on the bulletin and said together.

Prayer for Our Digital World

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Help us to recognise the evil latent in a communication that does not build communion.
Help us to remove the venom from our judgements.
Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.

You are faithful and trustworthy; may our words be seeds of goodness for the world:

where there is shouting, let us practise listening;
where there is confusion, let us inspire harmony;
where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity;
where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity;
where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety;
where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions;
where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust;
where there is hostility, let us bring respect;
where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.

- A Prayer from Pope Francis, 2018
Message for the 52nd World Communications Day

For further details about the Catholic Bishops' Statement, visit the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website www.acsjc.org.au or call (02) 8306 3499

The ACSJC website also has resources available for download, including a PowerPoint presentation and Community Education resource suitable for parish groups and senior students.