

Social Justice Sunday Liturgy Notes

September 28, 2014

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Social Justice Statement 2014–2015

A Crown for Australia: striving for the best in our sporting nation

Overview:

In the Social Justice Statement for 2014–2015, the Catholic bishops of Australia encourage all Australians to rejoice in the physical capabilities that God has given us, to use them fairly and to challenge any practices that undermine good sportsmanship.

The Statement, titled *A Crown for Australia: striving for the best in our sporting nation* celebrates the gifts that sport brings to our country and encourages all that is best in it. It also challenges the darker side of sport: violence on and off the field, abuse of drugs, racism, sexism and commercial exploitation. The Statement invites us to look at the place of sport in our lives. It encourages us to ensure that sport can thrive and nourish our society and challenges us to confront the influences that undermine or distort its ideals.

Liturgy Notes

The following notes may be of use to link the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time with Social Justice Sunday 2014.

Welcome

Today is Social Justice Sunday. The Australian Catholic Bishops have published a Social Justice Statement, titled *A Crown for Australia: striving for the best in our sporting nation*. The statement celebrates the gifts that sport brings to our country and encourages all that is best in it. It also challenges the darker side of sport: violence on and off the field, abuse of drugs, racism, sexism and commercial exploitation.

Readings

The Readings for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A) are about attending to our own actions and integrity, putting on the mind of Christ and while being true to our word, remaining open to a change of heart and mind.

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Ezekiel challenges the Israelites in exile to stop blaming God and others for their predicament and to change themselves and maintain their own integrity whatever the circumstances.

Philippians 2:1-11

St Paul reminds us that in our minds we must be the same as Christ Jesus. That calls on us to put on the mind of Christ and think of others, not just ourselves.

Gospel: Matthew 21:28–32

Jesus tells a parable that invites us to look at what the first son *does* – not at what the second son *says* he will do! Jesus allows room for us to “think better of it” – to change. We are challenged to also allow others to change.

Reflection on Readings/Homily Notes

Today's readings are about saying 'Yes' and doing what we say we will do.

Ezekiel is speaking to his people in exile, who regard their situation as *unfair punishment* and are blaming God for their predicament, *What the Lord does is unjust*. Ezekiel urges them to stop blaming God and others and to change themselves so they can more effectively cope with their situation. Regardless of the circumstances they can maintain their own integrity.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians encourages them say *Yes* to God in the way Jesus exemplified commitment. He emptied himself, even to accepting death so they we might live. The phrase *let there be no competition among you* seems to undermine the very basis every competitive sports club there is! However, the meaning is deeper than this. Paul is calling us to regard everyone as equal, even to consider the other person as *better* than ourselves so that *nobody thinks of their own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead*. The message Paul is imparting is: *In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus*. The analogy in sport – and life - is not difficult to see. When players focus on the team and not just on themselves, invariably it draws the best out of them as individuals makes for a better team effort. The opposite is also true; when players focus on themselves and draw attention to themselves, their own game suffers and the team is diminished.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells a parable of the first son, who says *No*; he won't go to the vineyards to work but later he *thought better of it* and went. The second son says *Yes* he will go. But he doesn't.

Sports commentators often say of a team or of individual players, *They have turned up to play today*. This sounds like stating the obvious: of course they have turned up to play! However, it usually means that the players are not just taking their position on the field or court and running around to keep up the appearance of being there - they are playing their hearts out; they are making an all-out effort to play to the best of their ability.

The first son turned up to play. The second son didn't. The first son had a change of heart and followed through with his actions. The second son kept up the appearance of obedience to his father, but didn't follow through with action.

A simple interpretation of the parable might be that we should say what we mean and mean what we say. But in this parable Jesus is addressing the chief priests and the elders who, like the second son, profess to do the will of God but their actions are not congruent with their words.

Jesus constantly confronted the pious who seemed to epitomize a *Yes* to God by their strict observance of religious and ritualistic rule, yet lacked compassion for those oppressed by their strict interpretation of religious rules and observances. He accused them of putting burdens on the shoulders of others while being unwilling to lift a finger to help them. He called them hypocrites because they appeared to give a *Yes* to God, but in their attitude and actions, they were saying *No* to what God really asked of them. The apparently good people didn't see any need to respond to Jesus' invitation to change their lives and follow him.

The tax collectors and prostitutes on the other hand, the sinners, heard the message preached by John and by Jesus and took it to heart. In Jesus' parable they *are making their way into the kingdom of God* before the chief priests and elders. They have had a change of heart – and acted accordingly.

The parable encourages us to exercise the prerogative to change one's mind, to recognise the graced moment when, like the first son, we *think better of it* and do what we know to be right. The God in Jesus' parable is the God of mercy, the God of second chances. God is present where there is hope for a life reformed. God is present where there is mercy.

Anyone who has played any form of sport knows the gift of the second chance – of next time, next game, next round, next week, next year.... Not even professional sports people get it right every time. But they try to – they train and practise and are open to their coach's advice; they are keen to improve their game. As are children learning a new skill. There is delight in seeing your team come good, as there is delight in seeing a child finally take a catch, connect bat and ball, or make it to the end of the pool. And if they don't – there is always next time.

The Social Justice Statement points out that:

".. sport has a wonderful capacity to reveal and model key values and aspects of life that go way beyond the playing arena. Even when a team spends years in the doldrums, the communities of players, volunteers and supporters around them show extraordinary resilience and keep faith that one year their loyalty will pay off."

As we reflect on our lives for the last week, month or years, more than likely we want the second chance this parable offers us. We want to be able to change our minds, repent and do the good things we know we are called to do – and do them with the wholehearted *Yes* the gospel requires of us.

Prayers of the Faithful

Introduction: We pray to the God of all creation and celebrate the gift of our bodies as a marvel of creation.

We pray for Pope Francis and ask that we heed his words that our participation in sport benefits society and strengthens the common good with the values of generosity, camaraderie and beauty.

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

We pray for the leaders of our nation, that they may carry work with justice for all and with special regards for those who are most vulnerable in our society.

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

We pray for our sporting nation that coaches, trainers, administrators, players and volunteers use their gifts to shape us as a community steeped in fair play and respect for all people.

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

We pray that we use well the gifts of our bodies by eating, sleeping and exercising well.

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

We pray for local teams, players, volunteers and supporters. May their efforts build vibrant communities.

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

We pray for those who work to ensure that sport is kept fair, accessible to all and free of undue commercial influence.

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

We pray for those who have 'run the race' and throughout their lives dedicated themselves to others through sport. May they rest in peace.

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

For the Parish Bulletin

We celebrate Social Justice Sunday on 28th September. The 2014–15 Social Justice Statement is titled ***A Crown for Australia: striving for the best in our sporting nation***. The statement celebrates the gifts that sport brings to our country and encourages all that is best in it. It also challenges the darker side of sport: violence on and off the field, abuse of drugs, racism, sexism and commercial exploitation.

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

The ACSJC website has resources available for download free of charge. They include a PowerPoint presentation and a Community Education resource suitable for parish groups and senior students.

Suggested Music

Abide O Spirit of Life (D. Haas)
A New Heart for a New World (Watts/O'Brien)
Amazing Grace (Traditional)
Bread of life, Hope for the World (B. Farrell)
Bring Forth the Kingdom (M. Haugen)
Christ Be Our Light (D. Haas)
Christ Be Our Light (B. Farrell)
City of God (St Louis Jesuits)
Come to the Feast (M. Haugen)
Come As You Are. (Deidre Brown)
Galilee Song (Frank Anderson)
Harvest of Justice (D. Haas)
Hosea [Come Back to Me] (Weston Priory)
No Right to Crush God's People (Peter Kearney)
The Beatitudes (Peter Kearney)
The God of Second Chances (D. Haas)
The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor (St Louis Jesuits)
Voices That Challenge (D. Haas)
We Are Called (D. Haas)

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

Prayer for Good Sports

God of all sports (and none):
From our small minds,
how amused you must be
when our prayers about sport
are about our own success or our team's.
Whose side are you on?
How do you choose
when supporters from both sides
implore your divine intervention?

Remind us that in prayer
our hearts are opened to you
and our minds lifted beyond ourselves.
Just as prayer changes us,
not you, O God,
so sport too, can lift us beyond ourselves.
So, we pray:

We give thanks for the gift of our bodies,
for the ability to run, walk, jump,
swim, catch and throw.

We pray for patience and discipline,
that we may learn the joy of mastering new skills:
achieving success, and cheerfully bearing failure
in the company of others.

We pray that our relationships be enriched
through the friendships we form.
May we learn to include others across borders
of language, colour, gender and religion.

We pray that we care for others.
May we especially look out for those
who are differently abled,
and those often left on the boundaries.

Through our vigilance
may we always play fair,
and ensure that no one is abused or exploited.

We ask this through Jesus your son. Amen.

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