

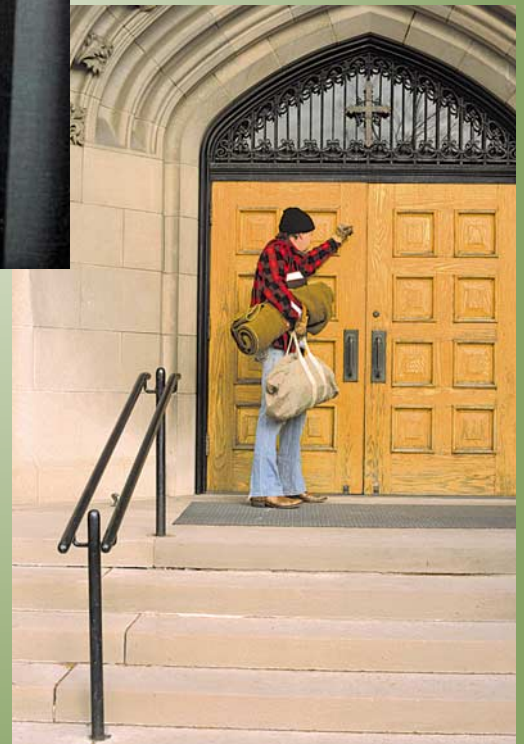
# JESUS, LIGHT FOR THE WORLD



*Living  
the Gospel  
Today*



**Social Justice  
Sunday  
Statement  
2005**



**Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**

## Chairman's message

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, I present the Social Justice Sunday Statement for 2005, *Jesus, Light for the World – Living the Gospel Today*.

The light of the Risen Christ illuminates our lives – transforming the day-to-day realities of our world and bringing hope to situations of human tragedy and seemingly insurmountable despair.

An old Vietnamese woman who died recently in Sydney knew about the darkness and also of great light. Many years ago her son left Vietnam. As a young priest he studied canon law in Rome. When he returned home he found himself caught up in the violence that eventually became the Vietnam war. With the fall of Siagon he was thrown into prison. He was held in solitary confinement for nine of the 13 years he was imprisoned.

His spirit should have been broken, but it wasn't. His faith, prayer and the occasional celebration of Mass gave him a peace and strength that his guards couldn't understand. Even in the darkness of prison, he shone a light both gentle and powerful.

Eventually he was released and allowed to go to Rome where he was made President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Cardinal Nguyen Van

Thuan died in 2002. In many respects the story of the Cardinal and his family is exceptional. But it is a story that resonates with those of many people who have come to our shores after enduring great violence and hardship. The stories of so many of these Australians reflect the resilience of the human spirit and the power of faith. They give us a deeper appreciation of the peace and prosperity our nation enjoys.

This statement brings to each of us the Word of God and reminds us of the baptismal call we share to bring this Good News to the world. We are called, not just to follow the light, but to be the light for others. We are called to bring Christ's light to all people, serving them in their need and celebrating their joys and hopes.



With every blessing

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Christopher Saunders".

Christopher A. Saunders, DD  
Bishop of Broome  
Chairman  
Australian Catholic Social  
Justice Council

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference thanks all who have been involved in the drafting, editing, and production of the 2005 Social Justice Sunday Statement. An electronic version of the Statement is available on the ACBC website at [www.acbc.catholic.org.au](http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au) and the ACSJC website at [www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au)

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# JESUS, LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

## *Living the Gospel Today*



*It was the fourth-last house at the edge of the town as the highway headed south. The family that lived there had small children so there was always a light on somewhere in case one of the little ones was a bit sick or afraid. That practical light brought some calm to the home and a feeling of safety. But it could be seen from the outside too. Some nights a stranger in need would call, drawn by the light and thinking if there was a light on then there was someone awake who could help. And the husband and wife would have to wake and decide whether to answer, knowing that the light that kept the children secure had attracted others in distress or possible danger.*

**W**e have a light. It shines for our lives, but it also attracts others who are in need. We cannot know who will come, when, or why, but our light offers a glimmer of hope. Will we answer the door, will we hear the knock, will we be the light?

Jesus is the light of our lives. He is light for our footsteps and the guide for our path. As we walk in the light we give it a chance to shine in our world. How today are we light for the world? How does the light of Christ transform

the darkness and emptiness in our lives? In this transformation we become more alive to the hope and joy in our hearts.

More directly, though, we need to ask how does the light that illumines our thoughts and actions remind us of our call to cast that same light into the pain and anxiety of those around us? How does the light of Christ help us to see and cherish the hopes and joys of the men and women we meet? As light for the world we take up the challenge of what it means to live the Gospel today.



## Jesus Christ our light

Jesus is not just a teacher of light who leads us along a path of enlightenment which we take by dint of our own efforts. Jesus is the light of the world. Light streams from what he says and does.

In his public ministry, Jesus brought to the people of his time a way of seeing and acting that both surprised and comforted them. He revisited their deepest customs and practices, gave them a freshness and relevance, and offered the people new insight into the meaning of their lives together. Different Gospel stories open this up for us.

### *The cure of a sick woman*

While on his way to cure a young girl Jesus was touched by a woman who had suffered for 12 years from bleeding (Lk 8:40-56). Her condition was incurable and her life unliveable. She reached from the darkness to touch the light which was her only hope, and she was healed. But why was she so ashamed, so keen to remain anonymous? The sickness in her body left her an outcast in her world.

The constant bleeding meant she was ritually unclean and so unable to live out her faith. She was a person to be avoided because anyone who came into contact with her also risked becoming unclean. Even in the midst of the crowd, she was alone. Yet amidst all the fuss and excitement, Jesus recognised her touch.

We know he was moved and responded to her need. We know that in his presence she overcame her fear and anxiety. We know that Jesus declared that she was a woman of faith, although the crowd and the law would have thought otherwise. Further we know that Jesus took the time to attend to a powerless, sick and outcast woman while he was being hustled along to help out the only child of a synagogue official. In fact he took so much time with the woman that he came too late because the child had died. As the story recalls the child's return to life we are aware that the woman with the haemorrhage is the only person in the entire narrative who is praised for her faith.

This story is more than an account of the physical healing. The miracle of Jesus shines a

light on the treatment and place of the marginalised and dispossessed in society, the taboos that were part and parcel of their lives, the fear that was placed around them and the deadly isolation that could result. Jesus gave both the unnamed woman and the official's daughter a future. He also offered the people of the town a new way to see, shedding light in their darkness.

### *The hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger*

Matthew's Gospel reveals the depth of Jesus' concern for the poor, the hungry and the neglected. As his death is approaching, inevitably and painfully, Jesus' thoughts are elsewhere. His final teaching to his closest followers is about the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger (Mt 25:31-46). He builds the scene at the final judging of the nations and has the King set all of the people of the earth to ask themselves:

*When was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty? When was it that we saw you a stranger; naked; sick or in prison?*

The answer that leads to eternal life has a number of facets. It involves feeding the hungry, offering drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. The response of the King dismantles any attempt to keep charity and care within restricted circles. He extends it even to the least among men and women, and in doing so makes the surprising revelation that the greatest of all identifies completely with these lowest of the low:

*I tell you truly, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*

The people who showed compassion to the least had actually begun to build the Kingdom of God on earth and so are called to take their place in eternal life.

As Jesus approaches death, his closing words to his disciples are to care for the poor. We too are charged to help the destitute of any nation or race or belief. We are to be their light, and in taking up their suffering and bringing them hope, we encounter the light.

*‘Jesus is the light of the world. Light streams from what he says and does.’*



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*‘The people who showed compassion to the least had actually begun to build the Kingdom of God on earth.’*

We cannot do this without seeking out and uprooting the causes of poverty, as we also deal with its symptoms.

At the Second Vatican Council the bishops of the world called us to build a new world “founded on truth, built on justice, and enlivened by love: it should grow in freedom towards a more humane equilibrium. If these objectives are to be attained there will first have to be a renewal of attitudes and far-reaching social changes”.<sup>1</sup>

### *Recognising the light in others*

Jesus took great care to remind his disciples that respect and love for one another ought to extend beyond his band of followers.

When Jesus cured the 10 lepers, it was the despised Samaritan foreigner who taught the meaning of thankfulness and praise (Lk 17:11-19). The disciples were amazed when they returned to find Jesus standing deep in conversation with a feisty Samaritan woman at the village well (Jn 4).

They could not see any point in this: *What do you want? Why are you speaking with her?* Yet Jesus recognised the light in her and she became the first person in the Gospel of John to recognise his light and call others to it.

Indeed, one of the most powerful descriptions of the light of Christ in all human beings and creation is found at the opening of the Gospel of John:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people (Jn 1:1-4).*

The Gospel message of Jesus sheds light on our own times and guides us to see that we are involved in a common quest. Creation and human society are infused with the light and life of Christ. While we are bearers of the light we can also learn from our sisters and brothers more of what it is to live in the light.





## A spirituality for justice

In Matthew's Gospel we find a saying from Jesus that is both arresting and beguiling: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:3). Jesus is offering the crowds a spirituality for living out justice. The teaching is an attempt to show how God looks upon our world, assesses it and consequently offers blessing to the "poor".

When Jesus was asking the people to be "poor in spirit" he was challenging them to go beyond themselves. They were invited to stand before the poverty, misery, violence, pettiness and corruption that over and over again afflicted their brothers and sisters. To embrace poverty of spirit meant that they had no choice but to be aware of the darkness and to look at their own actions and lives in the same revealing light.

As they sat listening on the hillside the people were entitled to ask: how is this a part of the reign of God, how is such humility a blessing? Jesus taught them to see the world through God's eyes. Doesn't God's love stretch to embrace the world without backing away from injustice, evil, fear and indifference? Jesus himself did this when he grieved over the hardheartedness of the religious leaders symbolised by the city of Jerusalem:

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing* (Mt 23:37).

*'We are called to stretch our love to encompass what is unjust, bring it to light and transform it according to God's reign.'*

Despite this insight he still turned towards Jerusalem, where he would face persecution and death (Mt 16:21).

What then was the blessing? In part it was to love more as Jesus himself loved. The blessing was also that the reign of God would be made present in all places and all times. This implied a further blessing, to be fulfilled in God's time.

God's own justice required that those who are poor in spirit be rewarded. They would not be abandoned. This was an act of hope since still, like Jesus, they had to travel the road to Jerusalem. Yet, through the promise of the Resurrection, the blessing had already begun.

Jesus' beatitude challenges us today. As followers of Jesus we cannot close our eyes to the bigger picture and its overwhelming issues. Nor do we have a choice in

facing up to the "ordinary" behaviour that is a part of our lives.

We live and work in very human systems. There are constant pressures which can drain our resolve to act fairly, to protect the weak, to take up our part in leadership that would ensure justice for those in need. It can be demoralising to see these dynamics played out. And it is disturbing to know that we are a part of this and inadvertently in collusion with it.

Jesus drew attention to the needs of the poor even as he was facing his own death. Just as he shed light through his words and actions, so we are called to stretch our love to encompass what is unjust, bring it to light and transform it according to God's reign.



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*“We have to ask whether we can simply keep making and abandoning so many goods. Are they simply to become landfill?”*

## Light for our world

When we are able to place something in the light, other things become illuminated as well. There are many situations of injustice that we come across in our everyday lives. And there are numerous ways in which we are and can be the light of Christ in our world.

We have access to so much information about injustice and about stories of hope. The scope of some of the major problems of our world, from environmental degradation, to violence, to refugees, can leave us feeling stunned and overwhelmed. We find ourselves either too tired to care, or turning against causes because we do not have the time or energy to respond. The affluence of our society can also obscure these harsh realities of our world. Yet the world and especially the poor need the light.

## *Waste and want: a world out of balance*

In 2003, James Wolfensohn, the then president of the World Bank, made the point: “In our world of six billion people, one billion own 80 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP), while another billion struggle to survive on less than a dollar a day. This is a world out of balance.”<sup>2</sup>

In such a world, and so distant from some of the more desperate regions, we waste so much. Ours is a throw-away culture. The easiest example is to look at the food we waste, whether it is just sitting in the freezer, or the back of a cupboard, or if it has gone bad because we kept it too long. Have we lost a sense of the value of food because it is plentiful? Has the variety and availability of so many items left us too picky without regard for the values involved?





Similarly, we can turn the same spotlight on to the way we use energy and the ways we waste it. We are prone to leave electrical appliances on, use petrol for unnecessary trips, switch on the air-conditioning at the first level of discomfort. More energy-efficient goods are becoming available, but that does not guarantee that our use of them will be more efficient.

All these things have a cost, one that is usually hidden and which we do not always consider. The amount of food wasted also means that there has been a waste of water, chemical fertiliser, transport, labour, and an amount of depletion of the land itself. We know the same applies to metals, recyclable plastics and energy. Our use and waste of goods can pose fundamental questions about whether we live on God's earth or whether we simply live off it and will one day exhaust it.

Our waste takes other forms also. How many old television sets, cassette players, mobile phones, computers or printers do we have lying around the home and workplace?

As technology develops our machines become redundant, opening up two separate sets of questions. We have to ask whether we can simply keep making and abandoning so many goods. Are they simply to become landfill? Once we see them as disposable we are inclined to forget that they contain components and metals that are recyclable. We cannot consign so much to the junk heap without asking whether we needed to upgrade, or who else could use these items.

Then there are questions about the value of these technological changes. Some advances are real technological innovations, while others offer little improvement to our quality of life and ease of work. As people who are immersed in technology, all Australians have a part to play in determining how our lives are affected by it and who can share in its benefits.

It is difficult to think through the impact of the amount of waste, rubbish and junk we readily put out of sight. An Australian study on our habits uncovered a culture of waste, reporting that we spend more than \$10 billion a year on products and services we do not use, including \$5 billion on food that is ultimately thrown out. The figures are conservative, and we probably waste much more.<sup>3</sup>



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*‘The busy world of work and pressures to have a successful career can also leave us with less time for family and friends... Do our labour saving devices give us more opportunity to love?’*

If all of creation is God’s gift, then where in our homes, parishes, schools, workplaces and communities can we shine a light on the way we build, buy, use and discard things?

### *Never enough time*

If a life of affluence means a culture of waste, it can also mean a culture of busyness. The feeling that life has become frenetic and empty resonates across our cities and towns. We always have to be busy, because if the busyness stops there’ll only be the boredom. The busy world of work and pressures to have a successful career can also leave us with less time for family and friends.

Yet the things we are busy about are not necessarily related to our basic need for food, shelter, health and education. They are more about a certain quality of life and level of affluence for ourselves and our children.

Yet the pursuit of these is not bringing us comfort, peace of mind or freedom from anxiety. Nor is our lifestyle bringing us health or happiness.

As a society, we suffer from high rates of depression and anxiety, turning to prescription drugs at record levels. The types and amounts of medication that we give to our children are a sign that things are not right in our lives. The rates of separation and divorce tell us that families are under strain and our relationships are increasingly fragile.

If Australians were to undergo a health check we could well be diagnosed as suffering from the ravages of the disease of affluence. Some may be more mildly affected than others, but the sickness is pervasive and we are all its victims. The question for us as Christians is whether we are to be found among the patients, or with the healers and carers.

Do our labour-saving devices give us more opportunity to love? Do our extra new clothes make us more beautiful? Do our computer games make us more understanding? Do our ipods leave us more creative? They all can contribute to love, beauty, understanding and creativity, yet our culture is such that we often lose these values as we are taken up with the things themselves.





Jesus, the light of the world, warned against relying too heavily on the riches of this world:

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be (Mt 6:19-21).*

No heart can remain intact and loving if it counts as treasure what can be rusted, broken or stolen. To reach beyond the things themselves to claim and embody the deeper values is to be light in the darkness that wealth can bring.

### Looking beyond ourselves

Among the dark effects of greed, waste and anxiety we can become inward looking and selfish. On the other hand, the effect of the light is to allow us to see ourselves and also to see beyond. The light of Christ searches, discovers and illuminates. It uncovers the larger world in which we live.

As a people vitally concerned about the reign of God, we stretch our love to embrace the hungry and needy on every part of the globe, and to every aspect of life on the planet. We can do this because we have the means to help. We should do this because in Christ we are their means of help. We need to do this because in them we meet the divine.

*‘People beyond our shores look to us for help because they are drawn in hope by what we have, both spiritually and materially.’*

The monks and nuns living in the earliest desert monasteries recognised this. The doorkeepers held one of the most important positions. When pilgrims and poor alike were met at the door with warm hospitality they felt a sense of being welcomed by Christ into his home. To the visitor the doorkeeper was Christ. Yet the one who made the outsider welcome also felt a sense of Christ present in the stranger, the wanderer, the hungry, the ill. To the doorkeeper the visitor was Christ.

We are like those doorkeepers. The light we share is not for us only, nor is it restricted to our own country. The light of Christ within us illuminates the needs of others beyond our borders and calls us to assist. The light we hold also attracts others in need. People beyond our shores look to us for help because they are

drawn in hope by what we have, both spiritually and materially. Their hunger, injustice, struggles for freedom and demands for human rights are ours too.

Along with others, the role that Australia took in dismantling apartheid in South Africa testifies to the power of shining

a spotlight on injustice and oppression. Our overwhelming response to the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami shed light on our values and compassion. We cannot turn a blind eye to the great issues facing our world, from environmental degradation to refugees to war, failed states and ethnic violence. For many people the light we offer unknowingly is their only hope.

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*‘When pilgrims and poor alike were met at the door with warm hospitality they felt a sense of being welcomed by Christ into his home.’*

But just as those monastery doorkeepers recognised that the visitor was Christ, so we also are transformed by our actions for the poor. The extraordinary examples of service of important figures in our faith show us this.

Mary MacKillop saw how children on the margin were being condemned to the darkness of ignorance. Rather than just shrug her shoulders, Mary gathered a group of women around herself. They went as light-bearers where no-one else would go.

Mother Teresa was an Albanian woman who did the same in the gutters of Calcutta, where the unwelcome lay dying. She welcomed them in the name of Jesus, and she still burns as a bright torch in the darkness of poverty.

Jean Vanier, the Canadian founder of L’Arche, welcomed those who are mentally and physically handicapped into the embrace of his

communities. Those whom some found a burden, he recognised as a gift.

These are among the witnesses of our faith who remind us of how much they were inspired and changed by the people they came to help. At the same time as we offer light to others in need, those we serve bring us new light and teach us to see more and to love more.

## The Gospel message for today

Jesus opens our perspectives on the experience of the hungry, the poor, the imprisoned and estranged. The wastefulness and “busyness” prevalent in our society turned our minds to questions of values, environmental degradation, recycling and patterns of ill health. This is an elementary part of the ongoing challenge to bring the Gospel to the world.



AAP/Dave Hunt



*‘Under the Sign of the Cross we are all children of God, baptised Christians called to worship.’*

### *The Church in the world today*

There is nothing new about the active concern of the Church in these areas. This year marks the 40th anniversary of one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the “Church in the Modern World”. It set the grounds for our current actions for justice and peace across the earth and in our hearts. The scope of this teaching from the world’s bishops is extraordinary.

As we read it we are reminded by them that the human race possesses more wealth now than ever before, but that a large part of the world’s population is still tormented by hunger and very many cannot read or write. We have placed before us the fact that our global community is bitterly divided around race, politics, social dissension and economic inequality.

The bishops raised a number of particular issues for us to act on and bring about change. They supported the appeal of the hungry to the wealthy, the claims of women to equality in law and reality, and the cry of labourers and agricultural workers for a place in society. They wanted us to work for changes to cultivate the dignity of all human beings (para 9).

The document speaks of the pressing obligation on us to be a neighbour to every single individual, whether he or she be old and abandoned, a foreign worker, an exile, an illegitimate child or someone who is starving. It reiterates our obligation to defend human life itself and the integrity of the person (para 27).

The opening paragraph has given us one of the most memorable statements from the Council:

*The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts (para 1).*

In their concluding statement, the bishops insist that “Christians can yearn for nothing more ardently than to serve the people of this age successfully with increasing generosity” (para 93). The point is clear: Christians are called to be servants. And it is humanity that they are called to serve.

The Christian life can never be a flight from humanity, with all its joys and hopes and sorrows and anxieties, in order to find and worship the divinity.





In order to find and worship the divinity, Christians must serve humanity. This is one of the main reasons why Christianity can never be banished to some private world, as if it had only to do with the individual.

Christianity is about the whole world in all its aspects. It is about humanity with all its joys and hopes, all its sorrows and anxieties. This is why Christians resist the pressure to deny Christianity – or any religion for that matter – a place in the public domain or the right to speak on issues of public concern.

In one of his first sermons, Pope Benedict XVI reiterated the role of the Church in the modern world:

*The Church today must revive within herself an awareness of the task to present the world again with the voice of the One who said: "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." In undertaking his ministry, the new Pope knows that his task is to bring the light of Christ to shine before the men and women of today: not his own light but the light of Christ.<sup>4</sup>*

In speaking these words, he was committing himself to a ministry of service to humanity by bringing the light of Christ to the world.

At the beginning of his papacy, the Holy Father reminds us that to live as a follower of Christ today – to accept Christ in faith and each day in our lives – is to be light to the world.

## *The Eucharist as Light*

In the Eucharist we gather, priests and people together, an assembly drawn from different places, languages, education and experiences. Under the Sign of the Cross we are all children of God, baptised Christians called to worship. The differences we find so important in our lives, whether of status or wealth or background, mean nothing when seen from the perspective of God. We gather under a different light that both reveals us as members of the body of Christ and reveals to us what our membership entails.

Together we listen to the word of God. In our hearing Jesus, the light of the world, draws us into different situations and understandings using stories, poetry, song, response and teachings. These many voices from the past are brought into our present in the homily, and applied to the poor and needy of the entire world in the intercessions. Each celebration

of the liturgy of the word offers us light, either to bring us further into its ambit or to bring out more clearly the things we are most reluctant to see.

Through the Eucharist we become more fully the body of Christ. Each Sunday we are made and remade into his body through the gifts we bring, the thanksgiving we offer, the blessing of the bread and cup and our communion in the Body and Blood of Christ. It is God's doing that we are members of Christ's body. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and the wine become God's gift, as is the Holy Communion we share.

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We are brought to recognise that communion in God involves communion in each other since it is the one Bread and the one Cup in which we are invited to share. We can be challenged to give witness to the communion we have with those who are poor and suffering in our world.

Saint Ambrose, the great fourth century Bishop of Milan, spoke words of fire to rich people who thought they were fulfilling their religious duty by coming to church without sharing their goods with the poor, and who perhaps even exploited them:

*You who are rich, do you hear what the Lord God says? Yet you come into church not to give to the poor but to take instead.<sup>5</sup>*

Saint John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, is no less demanding:

*Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk only then to neglect him outside where he suffers cold and*

*‘We have a host of witnesses who show us that something can be done. They are people who have borne the light rather than simply curse the darkness.’<sup>9</sup>*

*nakedness. He who said: “This is my body” is the same One who said: “You saw me hungry and you gave me no food,” and “Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me ...” What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices, when he is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger, and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.<sup>6</sup>*

These words were spoken long ago, but they remain fresher than ever in this Year of the Eucharist which provides us with added impetus to take up the justice dimensions at the core of our celebration of Mass.

Our participation in the Eucharist transforms us, and in the rites of dismissal we resolve to be a new light in our communities and our world. We are marked again and again each Lord’s Day by what it means to gather in the Spirit, to fall under the word, to offer the great thanksgiving sacrifice, and to enter into communion. We have had an experience of the light and been transformed into the light, a light for others.





## Living in the light

The call to live the Gospel today, to bring the saving light of Christ to the challenges of the modern world, can be daunting. But as Christians we have a host of witnesses who show us that something can be done. They are people who have borne the light rather than simply curse the darkness.

The stories of inspiring witnesses like Mary MacKillop, Teresa of Calcutta and Jean Vanier are well known. Their service to humanity, of recognising Christ in those they serve, is a great example of how we can bring light into the darkness.

There are millions of others who are not famous but who bring the Gospel message of Christ. They too are witnesses to us.

An Australian bishop has written:

*Every time I visit a prison, I am struck by the wives and girlfriends lined up (often with two or three little children in tow) to visit their partners "inside".*

*Prisons are very impersonal, unwelcoming places for all concerned and often visitors are treated with the same lack of dignity that the prisoners themselves experience. On face value, many of the women visitors appear to be a pretty rough lot, if they are judged by externals. But I never cease to admire them for their fidelity, for the huge effort that many of them*

*make to travel to the prison, for their seeming lack of any sort of judgemental attitude, for their devotion and their love.*

*I might add, their sense of humour must be called upon in a thousand different ways. I don't know how many of them would regard themselves as religious but surely they are living up to Jesus' plea: "I was in prison and you came to see me." (Matt 25:35)*

*All of this prompts me to compare them to the faithful women who stood beside the Cross to comfort Jesus as he was dying.<sup>7</sup>*

In their own way, these women are no less witnesses to the light of Christ than those whose names we know better. They say to us that something can be done. We find in their witness an urgent call to build the Kingdom of God in our world.

We are called to Christ, who is the light of the world. His actions and teachings opened the eyes of the people of his time, and they continue to open our eyes to the workings of God and the meaning of the reign of God.

As the people of God and the disciples of Jesus, we are to bring hope in our actions for justice, our advocacy for the poor, our care for the earth, our encouragement of our brothers and sisters, and our rejection of pessimism. In this we build the Kingdom of God and are privileged to gaze on God's face in the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the naked and the stranger.

**‘We are called to Christ, who is the light of the world. His actions and teachings opened the eyes of the people of his time, and they continue to open our eyes to the workings of God.’**

## Endnotes

1. *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, December 1965, para 26; in Austin Flannery, ed, *Vatican Council II Constitutions, Degrees and Declarations, A completely revised translation*; Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1995.
2. James D. Wolfensohn, "A New Global Balance: The challenge of leadership", Address to the Board of Governors, The World Bank Group, September 2003.
3. Clive Hamilton, Richard Dennis, David Baker, "Wasteful

Consumption in Australia", Discussion Paper Number 77, The Australia Institute, March 2005.

4. Pope Benedict XVI, to the Cardinal Electors in the Sistine Chapel, 20 April 2005.
5. Saint Ambrose, *De Nabuthae*, 10, 45: "Audis, dives, quid Dominus Deus dicat? Et tu ad ecclesiam venis, non ut aliquid largiaris pauperi, sed ut auferas": CSEL 322, 492
6. Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 50, 3-4: PG 58, 508-509.
7. Reflection of Bishop Patrick Power, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.



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*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people (Jn 1:1-4).*



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