

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY

"WHATSOEVER YOU DID TO THE LEAST
OF MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS
YOU DID FOR ME." Mt 25:40

24TH JANUARY 2016



REFLECTION I

by Mark Wiggin, CEO of Caritas Salford

When I was a stranger did you take me in?

The mass migration of people into Europe from Africa and the Middle East, especially from Syria, challenges us to put the Love of God into practice. But where do we begin? The task seems enormous and beyond us. As individuals, we can feel overwhelmed by the size of the problem and by the sheer numbers of people who need help and we ask ourselves, "what can I do?"

From Syria alone there are over seven million refugees and during the year over one million people migrated mainly from the Middle East and Africa entered into Europe seeking sanctuary either as an asylum seeker or refugee or seeking employment as a migrant.

Whilst the tide of people on the move continues to grow, the initial welcome and offers of hospitality have become muted and public opinion has become more polarised with many people now fearful of the cultural and economic impact of immigration and asylum on such a large scale.

Whether a person is on the road to find a better life or to flee persecution they are still a person and the vast majority of the seven million people escaping Syria are fleeing for their lives from a terrible war and seeking safety in Europe.

The word asylum itself is very old indeed having first been used in 1430 to refer to "a sanctuary or inviolable place of refuge and protection for criminals and debtors, from which they cannot be forcibly removed without sacrilege".

REFLECTION 1 (CONT)

This definition is an interesting one to ponder on as it was the Church that originally offered sanctuary and did so unconditionally, no matter who you were. So as Church today, can we too find it in our heart to offer sanctuary unconditionally and what can we do as a community and also as concerned individuals?

A starting point for action is to see each and every refugee or asylum seeker as a unique individual and person - not just as part of a mass group of people or as a 'swarm' or juggernaut coming at us from some far off disaster area. By seeing each person as an individual we can begin to connect to that person as someone just like us with parents, brothers and sister and with the same practical needs for food and shelter as well as the need to be accepted and be loved.

Another departure point for our action is to take a few moments to realise that the Love of God is searching for expression through us, through our actions and through our good deeds and acts of mercy. These acts of mercy do not need to be dramatic or on a large scale. They can be personal, small and simple. The child in a primary school filling a shoe box with sweets, soap and a pair of woollen gloves for a refugee family or a parish council raising a few pounds for the work of Caritas or Cafod or a kind word to a newly arrived asylum seeker in your town are small acts of kindness and mercy that make the difference to others. If we pause our busy lives to reach into our hearts, we will know that Pope Francis's call to respond to refugees is a call to each one of us to get alongside our neighbour no matter whom they are or where they are from.

At the heart of the Church's social teaching is an emphasis on the value of every single human being as every person is created in God's image. If we believe this, then every single person is precious and Christ-like. Any situation that limits or denies our common God-given humanity cries out to be changed and transformed through caritas - love, charity and justice.

The gospel invites us to get alongside all people who experience exclusion, rejection, hardship or insecurity. By walking together with refugees and asylum seekers we can with confidence answer the question, "When I was a stranger did you take me in?" with the simple response, "Yes I did!"

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