

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY

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

24TH JANUARY 2016



HOMILY NOTES

Bishop Patrick Lynch

Today on the third Sunday of the Year C we begin reading St Luke's Gospel. It is a very appropriate Gospel to read during the Year of Mercy - particularly on Racial Justice Sunday.

It is good to remember first of all, that Luke like the other evangelists was writing to a very specific community - a community that included Jews and Gentiles, young and old, rich and poor. Socially and culturally Luke's community was very diverse and included people from many different backgrounds. One of Luke's concerns was to show that the Church is not an exclusive club for a few but rather a community that has room for everyone - especially the poor, the marginalised and the Gentiles.

In today's Gospel, Luke describes the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He describes how Jesus goes into the synagogue, stands up and reads from the prophet Isaiah and declares that this prophecy is being fulfilled in Him and through Him. Luke reminds us that like Isaiah and Nehemiah and the other prophets, Jesus' mission is truly a prophetic ministry.

At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus reminds us that this means bringing hope to the downtrodden, giving encouragement to those who are suffering and speaking up for the poor and marginalised. Jesus is presented as someone who heals the sick, who teaches and preaches the truth, who forgives sinners and who shows compassion to those who are suffering. That is very appropriate for the Year of Mercy.

HOMILY NOTES (CONT)

Today's readings, however, are also very appropriate for Racial Justice Sunday.

In the second reading (from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians), Paul is very conscious of the factions and the divisions in the Christian community in Corinth. With this in mind he invites them - and indeed us - to reflect on the Church as the Body of Christ stressing that in the Christian community everyone is important and everyone has a contribution to make.

Our first challenge in the Church, and in wider society therefore, is to build unity and create understanding. This is especially true in the present climate when some are quick to judge others and see others not as people but as foreigners or immigrants. An important part of our mission as a Catholic church is to give witness to what it means to be "Catholic".

Secondly, our Gospel today reminds us that, as individuals and as a community, we too are called to continue Christ's prophetic mission in the world in which we live and work. There is however, a danger of having an unreal and over simplistic understanding of what it means to be a prophet.

A prophet is not someone who has visions about the future. A prophet is someone who preaches and gives witness to the Gospel message of hope - namely that God is always with us. If we look at Luke's Gospel that is exactly what Jesus did. He constantly reached out to and healed those who were sick - the blind, the deaf, and the lame. He constantly reached out and included those who were excluded - the lepers, the sinners, the Samaritans. He constantly reached out to and forgave sinners and tax collectors. Again and again in Luke's Gospel, Jesus goes out of his way to be with, to eat with and to share with those on the fringes and those on the margins.

Let us pray that as we celebrate Racial Justice Sunday, the Lord will help us to be in the Church and as the Church instruments of unity and messengers of hope caring for and standing up those who are excluded.