



Acting Justly

‘What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?’ Micah 6:8

Acting justly in our day to day lives is different from knowing about justice. It means taking action now and not being paralyzed by uncertainty. It means overcoming our blindness to oppression and having the courage to do what we can.

The Hebrew people spoke of a God of justice and abiding love. The Covenant between Yahweh and the Chosen People required that they live in justice.

When people failed, the prophets continually had to call them back to God’s way.

“I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ...But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5: 21-24).

Jesus announced his mission (Lk 4: 18-19) by proclaiming that the Year of the Lord’s Favour is characterized by good news for the poor, release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed.

As followers of Jesus we pray to be healed from the blindness which stops us seeing those in need. Many people are now held captive by the economic system or pushed to the margins as useless burdens. We too can be held captive by fear of losing our economic position and social status.

Like the prophets of old, the late Pope John Paul II called us to really look at the realities of our world: unjust trade relationships, human rights abuses, the growing gap between rich and poor and the damaging effects of consumerism on the ecological system. He pleaded with us to re-examine our lifestyles and reassess the perception that we will ‘be more’ by ‘having more’. He asked us to have the courage to realign our lives and our society to God’s vision for the world.

To carry out God’s mission to spread the Good News of Jesus, believers like Frederick Ozanam, Oscar Romero and Australia’s Mary MacKillop have shown us diverse ways to spread the loving justice of God. They had the courage to see and to act, throwing off their blindness and timidity.

Some of us have the capacity to understand the complexities of oppressive economic structures and work to create alternatives. Most of us can raise our voices in protest at the abject poverty in the developing world. But all of us can see our neighbour burdened by the complexities of life and reach out as a friend. It is up to us to overcome our blindness, sometimes self-imposed, and to implore Jesus to give us the courage to act justly.

“The war of the powerful against the weak has, today more than ever before, created profound divisions between rich and poor. The poor are legion!...

Within an unjust economic system marked by significant structural inequities, the situation of the marginalized is daily becoming worse. ... A drastic change is needed...

How can we keep silent when confronted by the enduring drama of hunger and extreme poverty, in an age where humanity, more than ever, has the capacity for a just sharing of resources.”

John Paul II, Pastores Gregis, #67 2003

PARABLE REFLECTION

The Rich Man and Lazarus Lk 16:19-31

This parable tells of a Rich Man who ‘dressed in purple and fine linen’ and feasted ‘magnificently’ every day.

As was common at the time, he no doubt saw his good fortune and wealth as a reward from God for his righteousness. His sin was that he failed to see and respond to the poverty and need at his own doorstep. The poor man who languished there, ‘who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table’, was invisible to him.

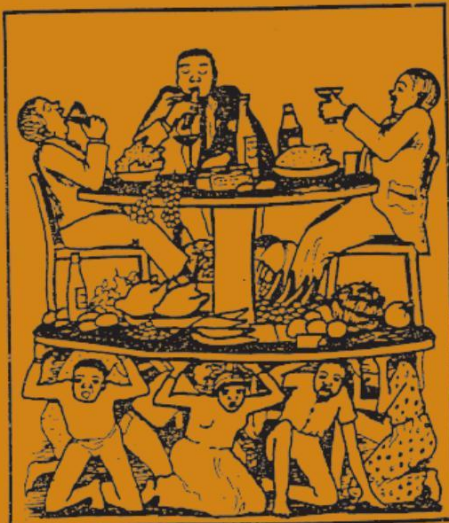
Like the rich man, do we fail to see and respond? Our blindness and lack of response may lead us to the same fate as the rich man!

Catholic Social Teaching Principle:

Justice: The loving justice of God is the foundation of acting justly in the international and local arenas. The test of a just society is its priority for outreach to the most vulnerable.

Earth Charter Principle 10:

Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.



“The World is like a table. Twenty percent live on the table and eighty percent survive underneath it. Our work cannot be to move a few from under the table onto the table, or vice versa. Our task is to move the table, to change its position if necessary, and all to sit together around the table.”

Jean-Bertrand Aristide

FOR DISCUSSION

Describe in detail exactly what you see in this picture.
In what ways is this picture a reflection of the reality of our world? Is it a picture of God's justice? Do the people at the top see the people at the bottom? What may cause their 'blindness'? What are some of the social, political, economic or religious barriers which keep people oppressed and bowed down in our world? Where are you in the picture, on the top or the bottom? To better reflect God's vision of the world, what might the picture look like? How can this be achieved without the table collapsing and people being crushed?

FACTFILE



- An example of global injustice – chocolate! Australians are the largest consumers per capita of Easter eggs in the world (200 million in 2004 at an estimated total value of over A\$200 million. (Confectionery Manufacturers of Australasia Ltd)
- West Africa produces over 67% of the world's cocoa beans. Child slavery was reported on cocoa farms in Cote d'Ivoire where 43% of the world's cocoa is grown.
- Revenue from West African cocoa averages US\$30 - \$108 per household member per annum.
- Poverty results from the manipulation of the market by large chocolate companies to keep profits high and producer incomes low.
- The industry has developed a Protocol to end abusive child labor, but it doesn't guarantee the minimum price producers need to meet their costs and thus cease needing child labour.
- FAIR TRADE (denoted by the label "Fair Trade Certified"), ensures that producers earn enough to send their children to school and pay their workers.

Source: www.bccca.org.uk/Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate & Confectionery Association
www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/fairtrade/cocoa/ Global Exchange – Chocolate Campaign

FOR ACTION

Within the Catholic Christian tradition, we are called to 'live justly' in three very particular ways, as in the words of Micah:

To love kindness: We are called to respond generously towards those who have less. Sharing our wealth is an imperative.

- Choose a reputable organisation and become a regular contributor to the work of the Church with the poor.
- Offer your time or attention, as well as your money, to assist those in need.

To do justice: We must recognize the need to challenge those structures in society which keep people poor or marginalized.

- Economic justice means the political will to reform global trade rules: we should insist that corporations are accountable to people's needs, that governments promote fair labour practices and develop fair and environmentally sustainable alternatives.
- Read the ACSJC Position Paper 'Trade Justice'. Act on the suggested ideas for action and advocacy. (see Websites below)

To walk humbly: beyond charity and challenge lies a deeper call for us to examine our own lifestyles, our consumer choices and our over-use of Earth's resources.

- Buy Fair Trade chocolate, tea and coffee both at home and in your workplace or parish. If you can't find these items, ask your retailer to stock them!
- Be aware of what goes into all the products that you use and reduce your consumption levels of all resources.
- Become conscious of the impact of your purchases on the people and nations who produced them.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.acrath.org.au

Fair Trade tea, coffee and chocolate.
 Campaign against human trafficking.

www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

www.fairwear.org.au/engine.php

Fairwear Australia

www.aftinet.org.au

Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network (AFTINET)

www.tradewinds.org.au

Trade Winds Fairly Traded Tea and Coffee



“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”

Justice in the World, Second General Assembly of Bishops, 1971.

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”
 Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

