

That you act justly...

[Br John Deeney](#)

Justice and peace

The linking of these two words comes naturally to us since there are now so many J & P groups set up in parishes and dioceses. They might clang in our ears as something of a cliché but as a pair they have a long ancestry; they are prominent in Psalm 84: “*justice and peace have embraced*”; and when the Lord comes:

*“Justice shall march before him
and peace shall follow his steps.”*

The two words should never become a mantra to lull us into a sense of pious well-being or to conjure up the dream of a future Utopia. If we do not have justice now, we will not have peace. If we will work for justice we will advance the cause of peace. And groups that work at a lowly parish level are not insignificant even in the context of international politics and trade. They do exert an influence – shaping people’s minds, bringing issues to public notice, organising action, joining with other groups to exert pressure and leading people to care.

There is a spurious kind of rhetoric about justice which has operated in recent times, with lots of examples available at the level of international politics; ‘We will defend our liberty’: ‘We will fight for peace’; ‘This group has done this to us so in the interests of justice we will do this to them’: an eye for an eye. This is not the justice of the gospels. Nor is peace achieved by attempting to crush opposition. Neither does any group have the right to impose its justice on others because it believes it represents ‘the good guys’. So the rich (‘We have a right to be rich’) should not be oppressing the poor because they are clamouring to change the distribution of wealth or to change the rules of trade. The respectable people (‘We have a right to our dignity’) should not be shutting the door on miserable, uneducated and disreputable people whose human rights are insufficiently respected.

But even if we subscribe to the implementation of justice we are not going to do all that is required of us as Christians. We need peace as well, a great desire for a peace which goes deeper than

tranquillity and lack of turmoil. For as Pope Pius XI wrote many years ago: ‘*Justice alone can, if faithfully observed, remove the causes of social conflict but can never bring about union of minds and hearts.*’ We would be in line with his thinking if we were to see real peace as that love which Jesus preached so radically: ‘That they may be one’. Whatever stage of social justice we may eventually reach, the demands of real peace amongst mankind will remain inexhaustible.

Breakthrough

The crumbling of the Berlin wall back in 1989 ushered in a challenging time for the reunited Germany and for much economic and social difficulty. But it was a breakthrough into a lost freedom for the population of the communist east. We are experiencing now the crumbling of the capitalist systems as practised over the last decade or so. A time of stress and turmoil but one which offers us the opportunity to develop a more honest and balanced way of running the world’s finances and to deliver greater freedom to the poor. There is no doubt that the developed world has been consuming too much, placing excessive reliance on credit and closing its eyes to the eventual payback time. Now that our shortcomings have been so starkly revealed, we need to turn our attention to creating financial structures for the world which will be fairer and more stable. As individuals our input will necessarily be small but since we all use banks and exercise our purchasing power and our vote, we certainly have a little bit to contribute to what happens. It could be a breakthrough for the poor of the world and an historic moment in the processes of globalisation.

Climate change

Who believes in this? There are lots of important figures who do not deny climate change but I wonder how many of them actually do believe in it. Perhaps it has low priority because it won’t

impact too much on their comfortable lives. Is that what we think? International meetings air the problems but generally come up with half-hearted measures to deal with them, especially when politicians are concerned. Scientists are saying that climate change is not just a question of what will happen, it is a realisation of what is happening now. In view of the current evidence we ought to be very cautious about what might lie ahead and take serious steps to mitigate the potential consequences. Nor are the dimensions of the problems just scientific – the lives of many people are directly implicated. A letter in the Times from a number of important figures (not politicians) put the situation thus:

'It is desperately unfair that the poor should again feel the brunt, despite being least responsible. Wealthy nations, who are in their advantaged position because of heavy industrialisation, are the most responsible and most able to lead the world in tackling climate change. ... we hope for a global climate agreement that will safeguard our planet and ensure that poor people can truly pull themselves from poverty.'

A to Z

From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe we could draw up a lengthy list of all the problem spots in the world where injustice is part of the fabric of daily life and peace is not even on the horizon. Our own little kingdom has its particular list of local troubles. This J & P column may be coming to an end but there are lots of live issues with which we need still to be concerned. In an idle moment I jotted down some that came to mind: Asylum seekers and refugees (a lot should be happening in this area in the first part of 2009); assisted

suicides; euthanasia; education in faith schools; adoption by same sex couples; abortion; the role of prisons and treatment of prisoners; human/animal hybrids; war and peace-keeping policies; and the list could go on. There is no room for us to be complacent.



A conclusion

It is all too possible that Justice and Peace matters focus on the negative aspects of life and fail to highlight some of the achievements that should inspire us to keep working for improvements. We should celebrate the good things that we see within the Lasallian sphere

of influence, in our parishes and in the wider world. And we should find joy in our work. Here, to end with, is a positive statement from Vatican II about the value of our talents and a reminder of our priorities when we use them:

“Christians ought to be convinced that the achievements of the human race are a sign of God’s greatness and the fulfilment of his mysterious design. With an increase in human power comes a broadening of responsibility on the part of individuals and communities.

... It is what a man is, rather than what he has, that counts. Technical progress is of less value than advances towards greater justice, wider brotherhood, and a more humane social environment.”

‘The Church in the Modern World’

What to do in 2009? Have a look at http://www.progressio.org.uk/progressio/Internal/90405/take_action/ and see how we can ‘LiveSimply’, becoming ourselves part of the change we would like to see in the world.