

Day of Reflection

Around 40 representatives from parishes in and around Glasgow gathered on the 26th Nov 2011 at the Ogilvie Centre for a day of reflection on issues of Justice and Peace.

The morning session opened with prayers, followed by three presentations.

In the first of these, Douglas **Morrison**, from St Joseph's Parish, Tollcross, treated us to a sumptuous exposition of various biblical references to the principles of Justice and Peace embedded in Old Testament readings.

In the earliest of these from the TORAH, (Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Exodus) the demand for moral and ethical code of behaviour towards one's neighbour is a constant theme summarised in Exodus 22.21-26. "Do not ill treat a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in Egypt, do not take advantage of a widow or orphan... if you lend don't take interest. If you take from a neighbour's cloak as a pledge return it to him at sunset". These ancient texts clearly enunciate the moral and ethical principles to be embraced; honesty, impartiality, and above all the treatment of the poor and dispossessed.

The justice theme is perpetuated in the writings of 8th century prophets, Amos, Hosea Micah and Isaiah. In a time of plenty for some there is no trickle down to the poor. The ruling classes, the aristocracy and priesthood all come in for a hefty dose of criticism for their decadence and hypocrisy. A lesson for our time.

The Psalms also reflect the ongoing conflict between 'the just' and 'the wicked' with God favouring the just. (Psalm 1:6; 11:7; 37:29; 72:12-14).

The Peace theme (Shalom) is reflected in Old Testament scripture old and new and in the psalms. Peace, in the sense of health, security and prosperity is seen as a treasured goal, a future possibility to a nation (Israel) faced with an endless succession of conflicts and conquests from the Egyptians through to the Romans. They suffered badly under the

Babylonians yet still yearned for peace and a new age dawn. 'They will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, there will be no more training for war'. Isaiah 2:4.

The familiar New Testament references to Peace from Jesus include: "blessed are the Peace-makers" (Matt 5:9) Love your enemy (Matt 5:44) and his final farewell "Peace I leave you, my peace I give you." (John 14:27).and many more

Father John Gannon followed with his reflections on Catholic Social Justice

He embraced head-on the challenges facing our Church posed by a range of issues. He argued that the concepts of Social Justice enunciated and incorporated in Catholic Social teaching, recognised universally as valid, solid and credible, might be our Church's one remaining beacon of hope ... given the scandals that have rocked it in recent times.

He emphasised that Catholic Social Teaching the Church's so called, "best kept secret", and needed interpretation and wider exposure. At the same time he questioned some issues prioritised by our hierarchy recently. The recent clamour surrounding gay marriage compares to the almost deafening silence on many social justice issues such as the unemployed, the gap between rich and poor etc. etc. These are precisely those issues enunciated in the above biblical references and embedded within Catholic social teaching and which many justice and peace groups struggle to address in a meaningful way. He flourished his copy of the Poverty and Justice Bible which highlights over 2000 verses which explicitly speak about the poor.

He emphasised that Justice and Peace is not in the Charity business. The role of Charities and organisations like SVDP is the provision of immediate relief of poverty and need. J and P are concerned with addressing the causes of poverty, strife and injustice and challenging for change. He acknowledged the difficulties many Parish J and P groups face when attempting to breed ideas and promulgate specific projects and initiatives citing the experience of his

parish group recently amalgamating with a neighbouring parish in an effort to optimise resources and ideas. He also raised the concept of the Justice and Peace Parish, akin to say a Fair Trade Parish. The promotion of this notion will require a deal of thought, further discussion and debate but is an interesting concept nevertheless

Our third speaker of the morning **Father Bob Hill** invited us to reflect beyond the mainstream ideas and lessons contained in the six parables in Mathew 13.

For example the mustard seed and yeast are both are likened by Jesus to the kingdom of heaven. And yet the mustard seed with its exponential growth is in reality to farmers and gardeners alike a pest and a weed difficult to eradicate. Similarly yeast is a growth promoter (of dough) but at the same time its action shortens the useful lifespan of the bread i.e. it corrupts.

Hmm... Yeast does not get good press in the New Testament. "Beware the yeast of the Pharisees" "get rid of the leaven of corruption." Father Hill suggests that these are images intended to encourage a nascent embattled Christian community to continue to be a thorn in the flesh of society. In short those who have heard the Word are dangerous!!

A Hearty lunch provided by the Ogilvie Centre allowed time for free discussion and debate.

Father **Jim Lawlor** chaired the afternoon session which involved small group discussion sessions with four groups of approximately 10 participants.

Participants were presented with three quotations for discussion and recording comments.

Safe to say that for the majority if not all attendees this was a day not only of reflection but of education and enlightenment.