

SEEING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

INDIVIDUALISM

We tend to look at Scripture passages in an individualistic way: how does this Reading apply to “me and God”, or to my relations with another individual. We are living in a culture of individualism which stems back to the individualism that began long centuries ago. The Church as a people has been shaped by this individualism and it has shown itself in our preaching, which has focused on the individual’s practice of the Faith: “go to mass and the Sacraments, keep the 10 Commandments.” The Vatican Council has restored a communal perspective to us with its emphasis on the People of God bound together on a heavenly journey, a community of faith expressed in our celebration of Mass as a community.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

Many of the Sunday Scripture Readings speak to us of social justice and various aspects of Catholic Social Teaching. Not all, but many of them. We begin by seeing what the living Word of God is saying to us, here and now, in our circumstances with the situation of our people, our hearers, in mind. When we look at the Scripture Readings from a social perspective – what is this passage saying about the relationship of my people with each other, with people at work or in the community, with all our brothers and sisters of the Church, and with the whole human race, - we begin to see applications that we have overlooked before.

Father Walter Burghardt says: “Of all the demands on preachers, none is more urgent today than a persuasive presentation of biblical justice. Without the biblical justice that is fidelity to the relationships imposed by God in Jesus Christ, any and every claim to love God is itself a mockery.”

Biblical justice is a right relationship, a loving and just relationship, with God, with all people, especially the poor and downtrodden, and with all creation.

Burghardt says: “all genuine living, even God’s life, is a matter of relationships. The need?

Courage to touch the Gospel to relationships that divide the human family: poverty, racism, homelessness, unemployment, abuse; the list is legion. These issues that divide our congregations remind me of the parishioner in the film *Mass Appeal*, storming out of the church after a homily on social injustice, shouting at the pastor; “I don’t come to church to be preached at!”

We do not solve complex issues in a homily; we raise awareness, we raise consciousness. Challenge, yes, but encouragement as well. We put together God’s Word and social justice issues with a care for the sacredness of words and a love for the people we are privileged to serve.”

OUR COVENANT AND THE MASS

Jesus died to restore our bond together as human persons with God, in other words, to establish his New Covenant, our new bond with God and each other and the earth that God has given us.

Jesus renews and strengthens this Covenant with us at every Mass: He says: “This is the cup of my blood of the new covenant.” (Our Sign of Peace is a sign of our bond together in the New Covenant)

At the end of our homilies, as a transition to the Eucharistic Prayer of Offering, we could say in these or similar words:

“Let us renew our Covenant in the Blood of Jesus, our bond with God, with all people, and with all creation. Let us offer ourselves with Jesus in the Mass now, our lives, our struggles, our activities.

United with him, we can receive his power to love as he loves, to care for others as he cares, to work with others as he does, for justice for all.”

We can hope that gradually our people will leave Mass imbued with a resolve to live up to our Covenant.

RESOURCE: *The Social Attitudes of a Catholic* – Rev. Michael Ryan, (retired Professor of Catholic Social Doctrine, St. Peter’s Seminary, London, ON). Short, easy to read articles on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, which could be adapted for homilies.
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