

22nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Year B

There's a pretty blunt reminder to us in today's reading from the Apostle James..... we must listen to the Word of God, receive it and make it bear fruits that are visible. Or, in **his** words: "Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves....."

So how do we listen to the voice of the Lord who speaks to us today?

In his message to the Church for the 104th Day of Migrants and Refugees this year Pope Francis said "Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age" (Matt 25:35-43)

But it's not just the Church as some fairly anonymous entity which must be open to all – so must we, because we are the Church. As St James puts it again "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction....." And, dare we say, to care for the homeless in theirs !

The real issue here is that we are not asked to welcome and offer hospitality to migrants and refugees because we are exceptionally good people and we like these migrants and refugees very much (hopefully we are exceptionally good people and we do like these migrants and refugees very much !) The reason goes much deeper and is to be found at the heart of our relationship with Jesus: "Whenever you did this to one of the least of my followers, you did it to me." The Catholic Church in her teaching and practice echoes the depth of this relationship with Jesus. Way back in 1891 in his famous Encyclical "*Rerum Novarum*", Pope Leo XIII reminded the Church of a very real "home truth": "No one would exchange his or her home country for a foreign land if his or her own afforded him or her the means of living a decent and happy life." There's probably a bit more movement these days than when that was written – but the fact remains..... every human being has the right to a decent and safe home.

The Catholic Church teaches that all people have the right to live a dignified life in their homeland. Tragically, over 45 million people around the world are displaced. War, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every

kind have deprived millions of a home, employment, education, family and homeland. The Catholic Church teaches that anyone whose life is threatened has the right to protection. It is the element of persecution, threat or danger, or being forcibly displaced that gives rise to a right to seek asylum rather than to migrate through ordinary channels.

So what is the real issue ?

A person's country of birth is the single biggest factor that will determine their quality of life. A person's level of education, ambition and intellect all run a distant second to being born in the right country. As such, the Popes have continually called us to abandon a culture of greed and to adopt a culture of justice and solidarity, calling us to be more generous with the world's resources.

Pope Paul VI stated that if prosperous nations continue to be jealous of their own advantage alone, they will jeopardize their highest values, sacrificing the pursuit of excellence to the acquisition of possessions (*Populorum Progressio*). Benedict XVI stressed that progress of a merely economic and technological kind is insufficient. Development needs above all to be true and integral (*Caritas in Veritate*).

Jesus asks the people in the Gospel, and also to us, "look at what you do" Are our values in order ? The social teaching of the Church echoes the teaching of Jesus and offers us vital parameters to order our values. Are our attitudes – and our deeds – determined by real Gospel values ? That's the challenge for each and every one of us.