

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

You know, I reckon that that second reading from the letter of James to which we just listened is one of the toughest and most challenging pieces in the New Testament. Listen again to how it began.

“An answer for the rich. Start crying, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is all rotting, your clothes are all eaten up by moths. All your gold and your silver are corroding away, and the same corrosion will be your own sentence, and eat into your body...”

And James doesn't back off in a hurry, either. The reading concludes:

“On earth you have had a life of comfort and luxury; in the time of slaughter you went on eating to your heart's content. It was you who condemned the innocent and killed them; they offered you no resistance.”

It would be easy to write James off as just having a particularly bad day, or convince ourselves that he was paying out on the mega-rich. But perhaps not so simple. James' forthright approach is on display, yet his message is often lost on us. The price of wealth, luxury and pleasure is paid for by the poor, who are cheated, hungry and denied justice. It is God who is their defender, and with God by their side the rich are brought to account. The Christian community takes its cue from this letter, and understands that if it is to be the voice of God, the Christian community must align itself with the poor and those unjustly treated. The church's choice to stand with the poor is not an option, rather it is an imperative. Where God stands, so the faithful should be. Are we willing to stand with God amongst the homeless, and bring about the experience of a society within the reign of God?

It will do us no harm to keep in mind this imperative of standing with the poor as we read the Australian Bishops' Social Justice Statement *“A Place To Call Home. Making a home for everyone in our land.”* And I believe we should read the Statement – even if it does leave us feeling a little uncomfortable.

The Statement draws on the example of people who have gone out of their way to assist sisters and brothers in great need, of agencies and charities of the Church that have provided shelter, safety and care, and of Pope Francis, who himself has reached out to men and women on the streets of Rome and reminded us forcefully of the rights of people experiencing homelessness around the world.

The Bishops consider the extent of our housing crisis and Australia's falling rate of home ownership. They focus especially on those in our society who are most vulnerable to housing insecurity and homelessness. We are reminded that safe and secure housing is a human right, asserted both by the Church's social teaching and by the Declaration of Human Rights. It is the inherent dignity of each brother and sister in need of a place to call home that urges us to confront the growing challenge of homelessness and housing insecurity in Australia,

Inequality in Australia – and anywhere else for that matter – is a great evil. It explains the uneasiness felt by contemporary people, an unease felt not only by the poor but also by the rich. It demands decisive solutions. But where to begin and what to do? The first step is to become conscious of it – please read the statement!!

Wealth is a responsibility. People will be judged by two criteria: how they got their wealth, and how they used it.