Social Justice Sunday Liturgy Notes

*September 30, 2018 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

# Social Justice Statement 2018–2019

***A Place to Call Home:***

***Making a home for everyone in our land***

**Overview**:

The Australian Catholic Bishops’ Social Justice Statement for 2018–19 is titled ‘A Place to Call Home: Making a home for everyone in our land’.

The latest Census figures show that more than 116,000 Australians are homeless – something unacceptable for a rich and well-resourced nation like ours. Yet these people are only the tip of the iceberg: welfare agencies report growing numbers of families and individuals struggling to meet the cost of mortgages or rents and turning to specialist housing services, which are often unable to meet demand. House prices and even rents are spiralling out of reach of too many families and placing huge financial stress on ordinary people, even when they are employed. For those living on pensions or allowances, finding secure housing can be a far greater challenge – one that often takes a terrible toll on social wellbeing and mental health.

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 rates 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 on to confront the growing challenge of homelessness and housing insecurity in Australia.

#### For the Parish Bulletin:

*We celebrate Social Justice Sunday on 30 September. This year, the Australian Bishops’ Social Justice Statement is titled:* A Place to Call Home: Making a home for everyone in our land*. The Statement challenges us all to confront Australia’s growing rate of homelessness and unaffordable housing.*

*For further details about the Social Justice Statement, visit the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website* (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au) *or call (02) 8306 3499*.

**Liturgy Notes**

The following notes may be of use to link the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time with Social Justice Sunday, 30 September, 2018.

**Welcome**

Today is Social Justice Sunday. The Australian Catholic Bishops have published a Social Justice Statement, titled: ***A Place to Call Home: Making a home for everyone in our land.***

The Statement highlights the challenge of homelessness in Australia – a problem that continues to grow despite the great prosperity of our nation. We are reminded that safe and secure housing is a human right that must be afforded to all. It is the inherent dignity of each brother and sister in need of a place to call home that urges us on to confront the growing challenge of homelessness and housing insecurity in Australia.

# Collect

# O God, who manifest your almighty power

# above all by pardoning and showing mercy,

# bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us

# and make those hastening to attain your promises

# heirs to the treasures of heaven.

# Commentary

# The meaning of the prayer flows from the implications of the opening clause: God is so powerful that even pardon and mercy are possible. The divine acts of pardon and mercy connote the whole economy of God's love in Christ for sinful humanity. They express the Christian community’s experiences of the defeat of death and sin, and our restoration and preservation, experiences which are the foretaste and promise of eternal life. The verb ‘manifest’ further points to the transformative, disclosive power of this revelation in Christ of pardon and mercy amongst sinners. For the believer, this manifestation is the foremost expression of God's power.

# Our own experience of God's merciful pardon raises in us the desire to eagerly seek the fullness which God's love promises. Consequently we run and strive for the promises, exhibiting an enthusiastic and loving obedience for God's mandates and worship. The end result of this course is a sharing in the immutable good things of eternal life, including the complete revelation of that divine love, whose power is most clearly shown on earth in its mercy and pardon. Theologically it is hard to go past the opening description of the power of God: it is shown forth in pardon and mercy!

# In Christ we too are powerful in mercy. We can restore and preserve, we can offer through our lives a glimpse of the divine life. As this Sunday we concentrate the attention of the Church on homelessness, we are able to unlock some of the ‘treasures’ that God has bestowed on us in mercy. We cannot hasten to attain the divine promises by stepping over the homeless. We are admitted to the treasures of heaven when we hasten to their aid.

**Readings**

Our readings this Sunday invite us to acknowledge how God is at work in our Church and our lives, and in doing so they challenge how we bring that work of God into the lives of the most needy. The passages are most clear that the Spirit empowers us and the Church. However in this, the Spirit’s power is also manifest outside structures and authorities, and is shared by others who too act in the name of Jesus and in the way of Jesus. With this comes the admonition that sometimes it is we the believers who act against the admonitions of the Gospel, and for James this is especially so when we neglect justice for the poor, the hungry, the cheated and the defenceless. In answer to James, do we make a home for everyone in our land? Do we recognise the tragedy of homelessness? Are we aware of the nightmare it is? What collaboration can we bring about across our society to make a home for everyone?

**Numbers 11:25–29**

The Spirit falls down upon the leaders, transforms them and opens their hearts to prophesy. However the same Spirit sends divine gifts more broadly than we can imagine, wakens leadership beyond our structures, and invites us to collaboration in the prophetic task.

# Ps 18:8.10.12–14. R v.9

The psalm reminds us to that *the law of the Lord is perfect*. The Social Justice statement reminds us that we need be open to hearing the law of the Lord and not be swayed by popular and mean spirited arguments.

**James 5:1–6**

For James, there is no choice. The followers of Christ stand with the poor, the cheated, the hungry and the defenceless. And we are instructed to make a home for everyone.

**Mark 9:38–43, 45, 47–48**

The evangelist encourages us to recognise all those who act in the name of Christ, while recognising that often we are the ones who can obscure the ways of God.

**Reflection on the readings**

It is not all that often that we are treated to a reading from the Book of Numbers, and this one contains a double surprise. The opening section details the descent of the Spirit upon Moses and the 70 elders. You will recall that Moses had led the elders from the main camp and had set up a sort of elders base at a different location. The intention, no doubt, was to recognise them, train and test them, so that they would be able headmen as Israel faced an array of vicissitudes.

Good leadership is hard to find, and good leaders require training. In what seems as an unplanned surprise, the training included induction into the power of the Spirit, who descended upon them and allowed them to prophesy. Under the influence of the Spirit, the elders were cemented as a group, gifted with the Spirit, and endowed with prophesy. It is no wonder that this reading is an option amongst the readings for the rite of ordination of a deacon. The text teaches that in the Spirit, the Christian community is called to lead and to be prophetic.

The second surprise immediately follows. Two men, not amongst the chosen seventy and not part of the training camp, were roused in the village and also endowed with the Spirit. The Spirit had surpassed the expectations of Moses, and gone beyond the planning of the group. The Spirit was not bound to human choices, even those made by Moses, but exceeds the bounds and ignores the boundaries. The reaction the future leader Joshua is fascinating. Though this is a work of the Spirit, it cannot be recognised and Eldad and Medad must be stopped! Moses is more sanguine, and has more wisdom from his experience. He recognises the work of the Spirit, knows it cannot be thwarted and rejoices in the gift.

The Spirit’s choice of Eldad and Medad provides the link with the Gospel. There John the disciple is concerned that miracles are being worked in the name of Jesus without authorisation. There are a couple of points to be mindful of here. Only a person whose will is that of Christ can work mighty deeds in his name. Jesus is aware of this. He does not sense competition or an adversary, rather he sees that evil is under attack, and sickness and death are being defeated. He rejoices that such great help is given his ministry. Then he rejoices further when any help is being given, even down to a drink of water. It seems that Jesus would also include a bed at night, or more importantly a place to call home.

Both readings offer insight as we face the challenge of homelessness across our country. The readings remind us that the gift of the Spirit is there to be used! The prophets are those who speak and enact the mind and heart of God. We take up this prophetic mantle as our actions and reflections interrogate the causes of homelessness, and impel solutions. The words and deeds of the prophetic Spirit filled Christian community constantly ought remind our society that everyone is deserving of a place to call home.

As Catholics, we are being led by Moses and Jesus to recognise that legitimate authority and power lay inside and also outside the Church. We are to work with all levels of society to uncover and address the personal, family, social, structural and governmental factors that allow homelessness to be such a scourge. We are to discern the life of the Spirit within all groups and build coalitions for change. With Moses our hope is that God may bestow the Spirit on all the people!

The second half of the Gospel reading covers a completely different topic, and does not follow on so neatly. Here the emphasis is on identifying what stands in the way of our mission and removing it. Much of it is do with our own personal needs and difficulties, but the opening verses asks about how we protect the good of children. It is hard to avoid that here we have from Mark a clear challenge to ask what it is within our own community that causes us to sin. What are the ways we as a Church operate that have allowed so many children, young people, single mothers, mentally ill citizens to be without shelter in emergencies and home for security? While Mark directs most of his questions at an individual level – whatever in you causes you to sin – his passage starts with the larger institutional issue. Yet Mark sets up the question whether we are complicit in the sin of destitution and homelessness, and whether we are willing to eradicate what causes us to be involved in that sin.

Our second reading is a continuation of passages from the Letter of James. His 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, it must align itself with the poor and those unjustly treated. The ecclesial 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?

(Our thanks to *Pastoral Liturgy* for permission to rework some of this material)

#### Prayers of the Faithful

*The following intercessions are offered for incorporation in your Prayers of the Faithful.*

**Celebrant:** We pray to the God of all people, that our hearts will be open to Jesus’ message of justice and compassion and that we will be inspired to welcome and support our sisters and brothers who endure poverty and homelessness in our society today.

For all people who struggle to meet the costs of housing and live in the shadow of homelessness, that the abundance of our nation’s wealth will be shared to ensure that all can find a place to call home.

Let us pray to the Lord: ***R. Lord hear our prayer***

For our political leaders who govern for the common good of our nation, that your spirit of justice and compassion will urge them on to address the scourge of homelessness in our society.

Let us pray to the Lord: ***R. Lord hear our prayer***

For your community of faith and all people of good will, that we will foster communities in which all who are afflicted by poverty and exclusion will find welcome, belonging and assistance in their time of need.

Let us pray to the Lord: ***R. Lord hear our prayer***

**Celebrant:** Hear the prayers of your people, merciful God, and in your loving kindness, grant us all that we need to remain faithful to you. We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

***Amen*.**

**Suggested Music**

All are Welcome (Haugen) [CWBII 535]

A New Heart for a New World (Watts/O'Brien) [AOVI 158, CWBII 477, GA 438]

Bread of life, Hope for the World (Farrell) [AOVI 164, CWBII 459, GA 199]

Christ, Be Our Light (Farrell) [AOVII 3, CWBII 540, GA 404]

Come As You Are (Brown) [AOV 31, GA 212]

Community of Christ (Murray)

Gather Us in (Haugen) [AOV 12, CWBII 501, GA 526]

God of Day and God of Darkness (Haugen) [AOV 56, CWBII 498, GA 541]

Harvest of Justice (Haas) [AOVII 55]

Shelter Me, O God (Hurd) [AOV 140, GA 230]

The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor (St Louis Jesuits) [CWBII 618, GA 36]

We Are Called (Haas) [AOVII 60, CWBII 476, GA 514]

You Are Mine (Haas) [AOVII 2, CWBII 516]

**KEY**

AOV = As One Voice (1992)

AOVII = As One Voice (1996)

CWBII = Catholic Worship Book (2016)

GA = Gather Australia (1995)

***Suggestion:* The following prayer, issued with the Statement as a prayer card, could be given to parishioners or printed on the bulletin and said together.**

***Prayer for People who are Homeless***

Lord our God,

You who so mysteriously call upon us

to share in the sufferings of Christ,

fill our hearts with compassion

for those who lack the warmth of a home.

We commend to you in prayer this day

all men, women and children

who suffer because they have no shelter;

those who sleep in our streets and public spaces,

who have nowhere safe to lay their heads,

and who wander from place to place as a way of life.

We pray for broken families who cannot pay the rent,

for those who are the lost and abandoned,

for those on the streets whose minds

have been touched by illness

or whose bodies are sorely affected by disabilities.

We ask that your merciful Grace be poured out

upon those with addictions,

those who have given up

in the face of enormous tribulations,

and those driven into a homeless life

by crushing poverty.

God of Compassion, your love for us is revealed in

your beloved son Jesus,

who was born into homelessness,

lived with nowhere to lay his head,

and died for us in agony on the cross.

Inspire us to act in justice,

by all means at our disposal, to right the wrongs

of peoples who are suffering

the deprivations of homelessness,

and to see in them the dignity of a brother and sister

redeemed by Jesus Christ.

Let us have the commitment,

as people of the Gospel, to be ever mindful

of our obligations we have

to the poor and marginalised,

to work in your name, O God,

to turn sorrow into joy

and to bring all those who live in darkness

into your own wonderful light. Amen.

**For further details about the Catholic Bishops’ Statement, visit the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website** [**www.acsjc.org.au**](http://www.acsjc.org.au) **or call (02) 8306 3499**

**The ACSJC website also has resources available for download, including a PowerPoint presentation and Community Education resource suitable for parish groups and senior students.**