

‘SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY. RESPONDING TO GOD’S INCLUSIVE VISION’  
30 September 2018 - 26th Sunday Ordinary Time

Welcome to Social Justice Sunday.  
This Grand Final Weekend,  
This Long Weekend here and Brisbane RiverFire.  
And the middle of school holidays.  
So much to do and celebrate.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

Traditionally in Australia, the last Sunday of September is Social Justice Sunday in the church.  
Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen of Parramatta Diocese is the current chairperson of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council.

Recently he spoke at the launch of the 2018-2019 Social Justice Statement which is titled [\*‘A Place to Call Home: Making a home for everyone in our land’\*](#)

In his address, he said,

*“The Gospel teaches us that God has an eye for the outsiders and those who are in any way marginalised by society. In Jesus, God champions the cause of the socially insignificant, despised and excluded. Their dignity becomes the object of God’s concern and action in the world. As we observe Jesus’ encounters and interactions with them, we are challenged to examine our own sense of comfort and entitlement and ultimately to measure ourselves according to God’s inclusive vision.”*

As Australians we are pressured from within to be exclusive in some areas.  
Bishop Long speak of the pressures as our being **seduced**.

*“God in Christ summons us to live and relate to each other in a way that is different to the kind of ruthless, competitive, inhumane, dog-eat-dog, survival-of-the-fittest economy that we are being seduced into. We are called to practice an ethic of concern, care and support for one another so no one is excluded from the table or left behind; we are challenged to build a community of hospitality, compassion and neighbourliness. Let us heed the command of Jesus: ‘Go and do the same yourself’. We all pray for the strength to do just that.”*

### LEADING UP TO TODAY’S GOSPEL RESPONSE TO THE CROSS

Earlier in Chapter 9, we read that Jesus passes through Galilee, teaching his disciples about his forthcoming suffering, death and resurrection.  
In Mark’s Gospel we find three passion predictions by Jesus.  
In Chapters 8, 9 and 10 each instance carries a response by the disciples.  
It is through Peter in chapter 8, through John in chapter 9, and through James and John in Chapter 10.

## AS JESUS EXPLAINS THE CROSS TO US, WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE?

There can be many times in our lives  
when Jesus reaches out and invites us to share the cross.  
It can be in varying circumstances.

WHAT HAS BEEN OUR RESPONSE EACH TIME?

DO WE KEEP A RECORD OF THESE TIMES?

IS THERE A PATTERN TO THE INVITATIONS AND CHALLENGES BY JESUS?

IS THERE A NOTICEABLE PATTERN IN OUR RESPONSES?

## SERVICE & WELCOMING

But the disciples don't understand what Jesus has told them,  
as their minds are elsewhere.  
and they are afraid to ask him.  
Instead they argue among themselves about who is the greatest.

How frustrating it must have been for Jesus.  
And how frustrating for Jesus today when we don't understand.  
Jesus gives the disciples then and now an example.

The Gospel records the scene

*'He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them,*

***'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.'***

*Then he took a little child and put it among them;*

*and taking it in his arms, he said to them,*

***'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,***

***and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'***

## IRAQ

My recent solidarity visit to Iraq was in **two** parts

1. Meeting people who have organized the church programs and projects in the safer region of Kurdistan where many displaced people had found refuge.  
And to join in prayer at Eucharist in their ancient tradition.
2. Travelling outside of Kurdistan to some of the towns devastated by ISIS in the Nineveh Plains of northern Iraq.

And I saw incredible resilience by families.

CAN WE IMAGINE HERE A WORLD WHERE THERE IS **NO INSURANCE** FOR OUR HOUSES,  
PROPERTIES, CARS, WORKPLACES, POSSESSIONS?

ISIS destroyed their houses, churches, banks, schools, shops, factories, businesses, pastoral industries, crops, playgrounds, water pipes, electricity.

Their poultry and sheep and other animals slaughtered.

Their food crops, fruit trees, vineyards devastated.

**Homeless. Jobless.**

I was taken on tours of three towns devastated by ISIS.  
I remember the courage and perseverance of returning families and their hospitality.  
They have rebuilt some of their houses in some towns of the Nineveh Plains.  
They were so welcoming.  
I joined in a few meals, as is their custom of hospitality.  
They shared some of their stories.  
They want to know that people outside Iraq care about them  
and their efforts to rebuild their lives.  
They need to feel connected, as do we all.  
Thank you for the hospitality and welcome in Kurdistan and in the Nineveh Plains,  
especially in Erbil, Alqosh, Teleskof, Karemles and Qaraqosh.  
It reminded me so much of the Gospel teaching of Jesus.  
They pray to God for strength.  
May we pray to God for strength for them and those still returning.  
And for the families our parish has welcomed here from Iraq and Syria.

[We pause and pray]

#### TODAY'S GOSPEL MARK 9:38-48

With this background of discipleship, service and welcoming,  
perhaps the disciples finally understand what Jesus is saying.  
Not really.

What about the goodness of people who are not companions of Jesus?

John the apostle speaks on behalf of the group.

The disciples have tried to exclude non-members from working for Jesus.

The Gospel records it:

*“John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name,  
and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’*

*But Jesus said,*

***‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power  
in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me.  
Whoever is not against us is for us.’”***

We notice that in Papal Addresses and Messages in the modern era,  
the Popes address not only the Catholic Church but also all people of good will.  
It follows this particular Gospel passage and other passages of inclusivity.

The Gospel continues:

***‘For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink  
because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.’***

Let us pause for a moment and thank God  
for those who have helped us in any way,  
as we follow the way of Jesus.

[We pause and pray]

## THE SCANDALS OF ABUSE, DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSIVITY WITHIN

Having focused on those outside the community of believers, now Jesus speaks of the harm done within, by scandalous behaviour.

It is presented in a Jewish way of that day to capture attention.

***'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell., And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.'***

We might picture the large upper millstone that a donkey would turn. Such a strong image of such a stone drowning someone the Roman way. An image of the fire outside Jerusalem continually burning the garbage. The severance of body limbs and organs. Images demanding our attention.

Jesus demands that we do not cause people to stumble. Jesus demands that we are not to be a stumbling block to others. We need to review our behaviour and witness continually. We note the urgency of this task by the way that Jesus captures our attention in this passage.

The Gospel passage continues.

***'For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'*** ‘

May we keep the salt alive in our own hearts as we strive to be at peace. And we remember and pray for the homeless here in Australia and in Iraq and Syria and other nations.

Inspired by the Iraqi families who are trying to rebuild their lives and homes and parishes, I recall the words from Bishop Long:

*"We are called to practice an ethic of concern, care and support for one another so no one is excluded from the table or left behind; we are challenged to build a community of hospitality, compassion and neighbourliness"*

As he said – we ultimately *'measure ourselves according to God's inclusive vision.'*

## THANK YOU

Archbishop Bashar Warda in Erbil Archdiocese is known for his inclusive vision. Thank you to Archbishop Warda who was responsible for my brief Iraqi journey, and Saveen and Ban and Fr Denkha and others who were my guides.

Thank you to the families who shared their hospitality. Thank you to the Australian Catholic University which continues to share Archbishop Warda's vision.

And thank you for the prayers from our parish family here. So many to thank.

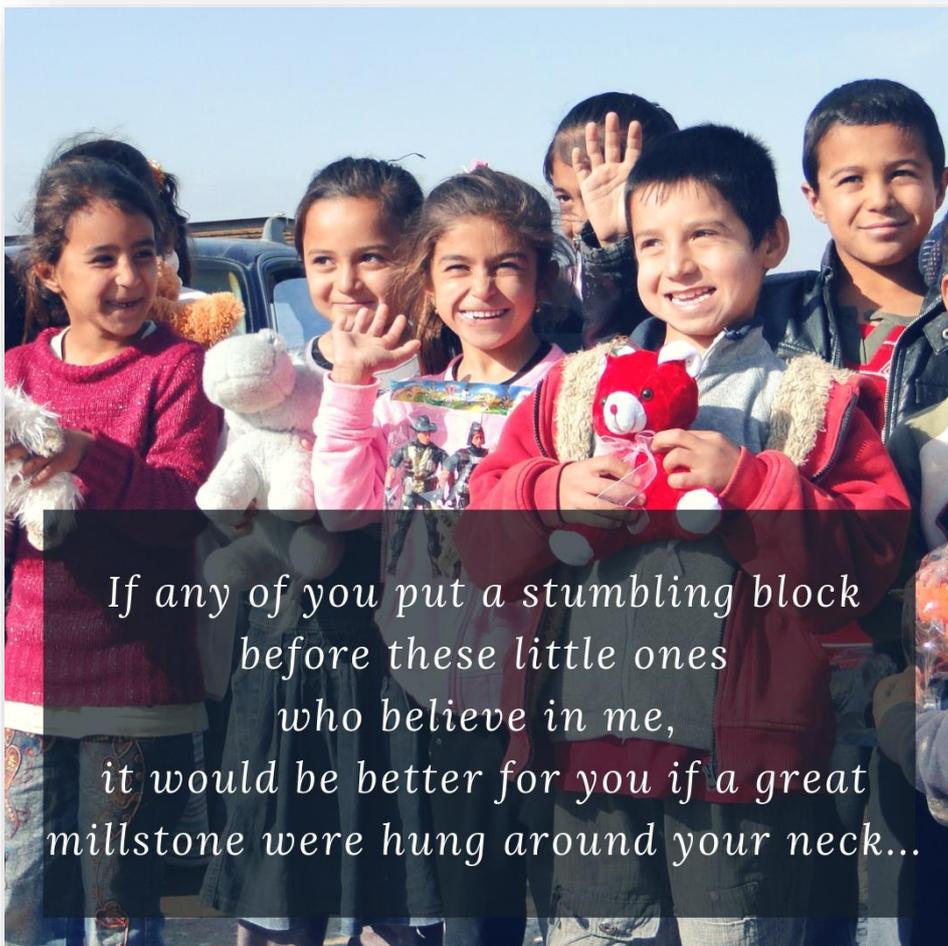
Let us now pray the special prayer for the homeless.

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/093018.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook30092018>]

Image: Yazidi refugees in Kurdistan region, Iraq 2014 | public domain



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