

How far have we come? How far do we have to go?

A Lenten message of reflection, during Passion Sunday, considering how far we have come as a country in terms of social justice and how far we still have to go, as we continue to build the Kingdom of God all around us for a better tomorrow.

21/3/21

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Give sentence with me, O Lord, and defend the cause of my soul against the ungodly people: deliver me, and rid me from the deceitful and wicked man: for thou, O Lord, art my God, and my strong salvation.

O send out thy light and thy truth, that they may lead me: and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

An extract from today's Gospel reading:

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.”

(John 12: 26)

“We do not exist for ourselves alone, and it is only when we are fully convinced of this fact that we begin to love ourselves properly and thus also love others.”

(Thomas Merton)

Today is special. Today we are celebrating Passion Sunday but we are also, lest we forget, celebrating a public holiday in our beloved country, South Africa. The day that we are celebrating together is Human Rights Day.

Just what are human rights?

They are, as defined by the United Nations in 1948, simply the rights everyone has because they are human.

These same basic human rights were entrenched in the new South African Constitution when the ANC came into power in 1994.

Interestingly, Human Rights Day in South Africa is linked with the tragic events that took place in Sharpeville on the 21st of March in 1960.

A quick recap...

On this day back in 1960, 69 people died and 180 people were wounded when police fired on a peaceful crowd that had gathered in protest against the Pass laws. (The Pass law was a system introduced by the Apartheid government in an attempt to control physical movement of non-white people in South Africa. It removed the basic human right of freedom of movement)

That day back in Sharpeville marked an affirmation by ordinary people, rising in unison to proclaim their rights. It has become an iconic date in our country's history as a reminder of our rights and the cost paid for our treasured human rights.

Why is this so important for us as Christians living in the real world that is far from perfect?

Because:

There is no Gospel without social justice.

There can be no Good News without equal human rights.

There can be no spiritual freedom without equal human rights.

There can be no physical freedom without equal human rights.

There can be no love without equal human rights.

The Gospel and social justice go hand in hand and can never be separated.

For to do so is to deny the core essential message of the Gospel:

“Love one another, as I have loved you...”

Today, we read in the Gospel of John how Jesus predicts His death. This is no light frivolous matter. This is a matter of life and death. This is a matter that is to be taken seriously. You see, Jesus knew that in order to give life he had to lose His. Think for a moment of the sixty plus people who gave their lives at Sharpeville all those years ago. They were also taking a stand for social justice, just as Jesus did some two thousand years ago. Both Jesus and the martyrs of Sharpeville saw and understood the bigger picture of humanity, sacrifice and love.

Both Reeva and I have encouraged you, this Lent, to reflect upon your spiritual journey, where you have come from and where you are going to, as well as the work you have to do to get there.

Let us, as a Christian Body, this morning, take a moment also to reflect upon how far this country has come since the dark days of Apartheid and all the suffering that people experienced for the sake of a false ideology. Let us never forget, how through the grace of God and prayer, this country averted a full blown revolution and went on to hold the first ever full national democratic election back in April 1994. I was there. I voted, as did many of you.

However, let us also, as a Christian Body, refuse to sit back snug and comfortable in our pews thinking that our work of standing up for social justice in our society and country is over. Far from it, I challenge you. Our beloved country is still suffering from great inequality and injustices. It is our calling as Christians, living and active in the real world, to continue building the Kingdom of God all around us. Part of that responsibility and challenge is to continue to stand up for the social justice that Jesus died for. For if we fail to take our social justice seriously, then we fail to take the Gospel seriously. If we fail to take the Gospel seriously, then why are we here this morning?

How do we do this?

It can seem overwhelming...

Start small. Start with those around you, both at home and at work. Be the change you would like to see in the world around you. Spread the love of Jesus. Be kind. Be supportive. Stand up for what is right. Be accountable. Be the light. Be the beacon of social justice. Jesus was. We need to be too.

Then, if you still feel inspired to do more, get involved with a social justice group that makes an active difference in society, whatever it may be. By giving back to the world we live in, we make a difference. It is this difference, no matter how small, that eventually adds up when we all contribute to positive change that makes a big difference. This is what we are called to do, both as Christians and humans. I teach. This is my give back and my attempt at building social justice in the world around me.

How are you able to make a difference?

Thomas Merton, a Trappist Monk, once said...

“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.”

Today we remember and honour all those who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom.

Today we remind ourselves of the demands of the Gospel with regards to social justice and spreading the love of Jesus all around us.

Today we challenge ourselves to review and renew our give back to society.

May God bless you in the week ahead as we prepare for the journey of Easter.

I wish you and your loved ones a peaceful and restful Sunday.

Fr Darron.

