



The Pope thanked the islanders for their solidarity and hospitality; he thanked the associations and authorities that work to assist migrants, recognising that at times the refugees and asylum-seekers double the local population of some 6,000. “We’ve lost the sense of fraternal responsibility; we have fallen into the hypocritical attitude of the priest and servant of the altar that Jesus talks about in the parable of the Good Samaritan – we see our half-dead brother at the side of the road – maybe we think “poor thing” – and we continue on our way, it’s not our responsibility, and with this we feel all right.”

The Pope prayed for forgiveness for our indifference to so many of our brothers and sisters. He launched a floral wreath into the water as a tribute to the estimated 20,000 migrants who have died at sea in the last two decades.

In July 2013 Pope Francis issued the encyclical “Lumen Fidei” – The Light of Faith. Commenting on the nature of faith, the encyclical referred to faith as the foundation of the pursuit of the common good based on a genuine universal brotherhood. This theme centred on the common good was picked up by the Australian Bishops. The Bishops’ statement draws on the Church’s rich tradition of social teaching: the good of the individual and the good of society as a whole must be brought together in harmony. When they are, we have the common good. This is not a time for religion to be pushed into some private corner even though there are strong pressures of that kind at work in our society. Issues relating to social justice often have the effect of polarising a community and generating intense debate.

Life is more relational than we realise. Seldom do we act entirely alone, nor are we as independent as we may like to believe. This truth is at the heart of social justice. Managing relationships takes up a large amount of our time and energy. Jesus’ teaching on relationships is practical and wise. Loving one’s neighbour as oneself is a growth experience and formative for an individual as it is for a nation.



The creation of a better world does not allude naively to abstract notions or unattainable ideals; it aims, rather, at an authentic and integral development and at efforts to provide dignified living conditions for everyone.

The debate about asylum seekers has a sharp edge to it because much of the language we use is unnecessarily provocative. Our political leaders speak ominously about “border control” and refer to boat people as “illegals” and “queue jumpers”; the language carries an implication that boat people are a risk to our community: that they have committed an offence by coming here and that they have behaved with some degree of moral perversity.

Asylum seekers do not commit any offense by coming here. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights every person has the right to seek asylum in any territory they can reach. It is a dismal reflection of the state of the politics around this issue that commentators frequently refer to asylum seekers arriving by boat as “illegals”. This is just not true. As for “queue-jumping”, leave aside that there is not queue where boat people come from, the etiquette of the checkout at the supermarket is not how it works when you are running for your life.

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Working together for a better world requires that countries help one another in a spirit of willingness and trust without raising insurmountable barriers. To build a better world, it is necessary to work for the elimination of prejudices so that the arrival of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees does not give rise to suspicion and hostility. There is fear that society will become less secure, that identity and culture will be lost, that competition for jobs will be stiffer and even criminal activity will increase. The media have an important responsibility to breakdown stereotypes and to offer correct information about the very complex and difficult journeys people often have to make.



Migrants & Refugees Sunday Mass 2013

The Church broadly supports the Federal Government in every move that promotes a more humane alternative to detention centres. It is to be hoped that more appropriate ways of dealing with asylum seekers will open the way to a more positive appreciation of what migrants have to offer. For many years, we as a nation have endorsed multiculturalism. Assimilation has given way to integration. Migrants are urged to maintain their cultural identity and to contribute to the social enrichment of the nation. The challenge is to combine the welcome due to every human being especially those in need, with a reckoning of what is necessary for both the local inhabitants and new arrivals to live a dignified and promising life in peace.

To be prophetic in our world is not to be perfect or to predict the future. To be prophetic is never to give up hope that things can be changed so that everyone can live better through knowing the love of God. This is a love which by its very nature must be shared with others. To be prophetic is to refuse to give in to all the powers that keep people down.

Above all else, it is the fact of being created in God's own image and likeness (Gen.1:26-27) and, even more so, being children of God which grounds one's personal dignity. We ourselves need to see and then enable others to see that migrants and refugees do not represent a problem to be solved but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved.

Yours sincerely in Christ

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#### Sources

- "Welcoming Christ in Refugees and Forcibly Displaced People" - Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples.
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- "A New Way: New Politics. New Policies" Julian Burnside: Redfern Town Hall, July 2013.
- "Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World"  
– Message of Pope Francis for the 100th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2014.