

Immaculate Conception parish Maryhill 21st Feb 2023

See, judge act: solidarity, migrants and refugees.

Thank you Duncan for sharing your experience and understanding of Integral Human Development and its role in tackling dehumanising poverty in the global south. In this final session I am going to look at the other side of the coin – how do we respond to migrants and refugees who have come here to seek a new life because of issues like poverty and violence in their homeland?

I want to try and answer the question by focusing on the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principle of solidarity and proposing a method of reflection that leads to action.

See, judge, act

The See, Judge, Act method was created by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn of the Young Christian Workers in the early 20th century and later developed by the liberation theologians of Latin America, among others. It is a way of reflecting on contemporary issues in the light of faith, with the aim of bringing about change.

See is about understanding the issue that concerns us by gathering up to date information and listening to the people affected by it.

Judge involves reflecting on what has been gathered in the light of scripture and the church's social teaching in order to deepen our understanding.

Act involves agreeing individual and group actions in the light of reflection.

If you look at Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*, you will see that this is the way he constructs his argument for change in our attitude to the environment. He begins by reviewing the best scientific research available (see); he offers a critical theological reflection of the issues which arise, drawing on principles from the Judeo-Christian tradition (judge); and this leads him to make proposals for action.

We will follow these steps tonight to consider the issue of migrants and refugees with particular reference to the CST principle of solidarity.

SEE

According to the UNHCR, there were 103 million refugees in the world in mid 2022, displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and poverty.

To begin to understand the issues involved, we need to hear their stories and learn about the issues they face. We could start by doing some research – organisations like the Scottish Refugee Council and Amnesty International have excellent websites which tell peoples'

stories, suggest ways in which we can become involved, define terms like refugee, asylum seeker and migrant, and clarify their rights.

The kind of questions we might ask at this stage of the process are:

Why have people uprooted themselves from the culture, language and homeland of their family?

What forces made living in their homeland untenable?

What are their stories?

JUDGE

For the second stage, of the process, we need to consider what we have learned through the lens of our faith tradition. Tonight I will focus on the way in which the CST principle of solidarity can help us deepen our understanding of the issues facing migrants and refugees.

Solidarity

According to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the principle of solidarity highlights our intrinsic *social nature*, the way in which we are all *equal in dignity and rights*, and the *common path we share* towards greater unity. We are *interdependent* as individuals and as peoples in a globalized world.

Religion has long played a part in shaping movements for social change – think of the contribution of Methodism to the formation of the British Labour movement in the 19th century; the role of Catholics in the Polish solidarity movement; the part played by Black churches in the 20th century civil rights movement and in Black Lives Matter in the 21st century.

Old ideas of fraternity and friendship have been reformulated in the language of freedom and equality. Solidarity has always had a *structural* and *communitarian* focus, reaching towards the idea of a community of action that goes beyond individual acts of assistance.

As Anna Rowlands points out, it takes us to the porous boundary between our understanding of the religious and the political (Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion*, p 239).

The modern encyclical tradition, as we have seen, began with a focus on Europe, with Pope Leo XIII's concern for the rights of workers in the crowded cities and factories of the industrial revolution. 70 years on, in calling the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII pointed the church towards 'global ecumenism, interfaith co-operation, and cross ideological dialogue, and set it on a path of justice and peace'. He envisioned 'a new humanistic civilization on a global scale' (Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, p 296).

Gaudium et Spes, the final document of Vatican II, stressed that we are saved and made holy not merely as *individuals* but by being made into a *people*.

In *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI said that the capacity to act in solidarity is itself a form of fullness of being human.

John Paul II called for solidarity to be practiced above all as a way of *seeing*: seeing persons, peoples and nations as sharers, helpers and neighbours in the banquet of life, to which we are all equally called.

Solidarity, he said, 'is not just a feeling of 'vague compassion or shallow distress'; it is 'a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all' (*Sollicitudo rei socialis* n 38).

The habit of solidarity

Writing in *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2013, the year he became pope, Pope Francis observed that the word solidarity had become a little worn and at times poorly understood: it is about more, he said, than a few sporadic acts of generosity.

He speaks about the *habit* of solidarity, about the creation of a new mindset, which thinks in terms of community and the priority of life over the appropriation of goods by a few. He writes:

'...solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible. Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become ... corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual' (n189).

Intergenerational solidarity

In *Laudato Si* he speaks of *intergenerational* solidarity.

'Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realise that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others... Intergenerational solidarity is not optional but is a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us' (n159).

Solidarity, migrants and refugees

Francis' pontificate has been associated from the beginning with concern for those who have fled poverty, persecution and violence. His first pastoral visit as pope in 2013 was to the tiny island of Lampedusa off the coast of Sicily to pray for refugees and migrants who had been lost at sea.

In September 2019, on the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, he inaugurated a 20 foot tall bronze sculpture in St Peter's Square which depicts 140 migrants and refugees from

different cultures. It was the first time in 400 years that a new sculpture was installed in the square. The 140 figures correspond to the 140 colonnades which surround it.

A process of becoming

The theological heart of Francis' account of solidarity is found in his reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan, which appears in *Fratelli Tutti*. He notes that Jesus reframes the question of who is my neighbour from one about codes and rules, to one about our developing capacity to become better neighbours. We are called to this *process of becoming a neighbour* through a radical attentiveness to the world around us, to what and to who is in it.

'Each day', he says, 'offers us a new opportunity, a new possibility. We should not expect everything from those who govern us, for that would be childish. We have the space we need for co-responsibility in creating and putting into place new processes and changes. Let us take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies.'

'Today we have a great opportunity... to be Good Samaritans who bear the pain of other people's troubles... Like the chance traveller in the parable, we need only have a pure and simple desire to be a people, a community, constant and tireless in the effort to include, integrate and lift up the fallen' (*Fratelli Tutti* n 77).

Francis' reflection owes a debt to Martin Luther King's sermons on the characters in the story.

He noted that the logic of the robbers is: what is yours is mine. This is the logic of domination, mastery and acquisition.

The logic of the world, embodied in those who pass by, is: what is mine is mine, what is yours is yours. This is freedom as non interference.

The logic of hope, love, faith and justice is that of the Good Samaritan: what is mine is yours, for the good of us both and for the world. This is the free act that fosters communion.

ACT

So how are we to respond to refugees and migrants in the light of these insights and with the information we have gathered about their situation? How can we become better neighbours?

We can make contact with individuals, faith communities, and organisations already involved in supporting migrants and refugees and advocating for their rights.

We might contact, the Scottish Refugee Council; Jesuit Refugee Services UK; and Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR).

The question we might ask: what can we do at an individual and collective level locally.

Thank you

Finally, I want to add my thanks to those of Duncan for inviting us to reflect with you on the CST tradition over these last few months. Thanks to Stephen and Iona and Fr Jim for all their help and hospitality. Thanks to all of you for your warm welcome.

It has been a good journey.

Resources

For a detailed and thought provoking account of solidarity, see Anna Rowland's book, *Towards a Politics of Communion*. Bloomsbury 2021.

When I was preparing for this meeting, I came across a piece online by Xaverian priest Fr Carl Chudy entitled *See, Judge Act, a Catholic model for engagement with refugees and forced migrants*. xaverianmissionaries.org/pdf/refugees.pdf It is written in the context of Massachusetts and goes into the methodology in some detail, which may be helpful.

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