



Belonging:
All Are Welcome

Introduction

Racial Justice Sunday is on the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

On this day Catholics are called to pray for those who experience unjust discrimination or are marginalised because of their race and ethnicity. We think in particular of those who feel they do not belong within our society or our communities because of this discrimination.

As Catholics we are asked to treat all humans with dignity, regardless of their background or circumstance. There are many stories of alienation throughout the Bible, with clear calls to “Love the stranger”. That the Church is a place where all belong is clearly seen in the recent Feast of the Epiphany, when Christ is revealed not only to the Israelites, but to all of God’s people.

All the money raised will go towards supporting the Church’s work on racial justice issues. The theme this year is “Belonging”, emphasising that we are called not only to ensure our parishes welcome newcomers, strangers, and those from different backgrounds, but also that all people will know they will find a welcome in our parishes.

Please help us continue this good work, by contributing to the collection on this day. Prayer cards and posters have been sent to parishes for this day, and can be accessed online at <http://catholicnews.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2018> where you can also donate.

Please do add this introduction to your parish newsletters for this week. In this booklet you will find suggested activities for your parish and parishioners, four draft bidding prayers which could be included in the Liturgy on Racial Justice Sunday, and a Biblical reflection on belonging



A Community where all Belong

How can we develop a welcoming, hospitable, inclusive environment in our church community in which all feel genuinely welcome, and can grow to feel that they belong?

As a Parish

- Befriend people who have recently joined our parish, and those who are particularly marginalised by society, such as homeless people, asylum seekers, refugees, people from the travelling communities
- Invite refugees or others seeking safety to come and speak to our congregation, and to attend other events or activities
- Invite people to join and speak at our parish groups and associations
- Celebrate the diversity of our community, through activities, such as creating a map to show where the different members of our parish are from, or through organising groups such as an international meal club
- Support organisations and events seeking to offer information and hospitality, perhaps contact your local Caritas Agency - is one of them local to your parish? Find out at <http://www.csan.org.uk/member>
- Make sure our liturgy is inclusive, think about using different languages or asking for readers from different communities.

As Christians

- Greet people with a smile
- Talk to people after Mass, especially those we have not seen before
- Invite people along to local events, or organise local events for them to come to
- Listen to those who feel most neglected or excluded, perhaps inviting them to speak or helping them access the support they need
- Educate ourselves – read testimonies from those who have been excluded; learn to greet people in their own language; be aware of prejudiced views about those seeking sanctuary in the UK – you can find some of this information at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk



Suggested Bidding Prayers

1. For those discriminated against

For those who experience discrimination in our society – that they may see the Church as a welcoming community where their human dignity is respected and their gifts appreciated.

2. For all who are lonely

For those who are lonely – that they may find Christ in our communities, that the warmth and friendship that come from belonging to our communities may transform their lives and become for them a source of support and strength.

3. For those who are hurt and feel cut off from their communities

For those who have been hurt and no longer feel they belong – that they may be drawn to the Church for healing and care. Through our love and understanding, may they be freed of anger and bitterness in order to live in peace and harmony with everyone, and may God help us to value and respect each person as a priceless gift from Him.

4. For the perpetrators of discrimination both in our Church and in our country

For those who unjustly discriminate – that they may listen to the gentle but persistent voice of conscience that tells us to love and not to hate, to make others feel that they belong and not to discriminate against them. May those who fan the fires of discrimination open their eyes to see that variety is part of God's marvellous plan for the world.



Biblical reflection

Belonging: so that everyone is included.

Introduction

The Catholic Church proclaims that all human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society across the world. Pope Francis has consistently reiterated that every man, woman, girl and boy is made in the image of God and is a free person - so must be accorded the same freedom and the same dignity. Everyone is included and no one is left behind.

Human worth and dignity in the Scriptures

A thread that runs through both the Old and New Testaments argues for the dignity and worth of humanity. This thread begins in the story of creation where the Scriptures tell us that human beings, male and female, were made in God's image and God declares all that he has made to be good as in Genesis 1:26a "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...'" Taking this one stage further in Deuteronomy 10:17b-18 we are presented with a God who does not discriminate one person's dignity from another's: "... the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, ¹⁸ who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing."

So we are imprinted with God's image. Our dignity comes from the persons we are and not from our race, gender or age. In Galatians 3:28 Paul tells us that in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female." We are morally and spiritually equal before God, we all equally need salvation, and we all share in the same means of salvation. This strand draws us to recognise that discrimination and abuse of any kind, are a gross violation of God's loving purpose in creation.

Throughout the Bible there are many stories of alienation and discrimination – whether from individual injustices and disputes to collective persecution from following God's call to the Promised Land and in the missionary travels of the early church disciples and apostles. At the heart of the Biblical imperative, God through his Law and prophets is consistently on the side of the victim. Whether it's in Deuteronomy 10:19 that you should "Love the stranger then, for you

were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Or from Jeremiah 22:3 where you must “practice honesty and integrity; rescue the man who has been wronged from the hands of the oppressors; do not exploit the stranger, the orphan, the widow; do no violence; shed no innocent blood in this place,” the message is very clear about right human behaviour.

The New Testament takes this one stage further as personified in Jesus who summarises the Commandments in Mark 12:30-31 as “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” However, very often our debates about inclusion and exclusion (both political and spiritual) revolve around numbers and targets rather than people and values. Yet people are not numbers or targets. So how then, do we justify our treatment of people when we discriminate against them? What kind of a society are we if we do not welcome those whom we meet or help make it possible for people to belong in our neighbourhoods, churches and communities?

A Church in which we belong

As people of faith, we must stand together to resist all forms of prejudice against our fellow brothers and sisters. The mission of our Church, herself a Mother and a pilgrim in the world, is to love Jesus Christ, especially in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are the marginalised, the refugees, the ‘outsiders’ desperately trying to belong in very difficult and dangerous conditions. This ministry of welcome is an expression of our communion with each other as a global Church with a global identity.

Diversity is an integral part of this Church identity – the word Catholic itself means universal not uniform. This thinking is revealed in Genesis right from the beginning of creation. In the created order, different beings are created in a sequence that is predetermined by God and each being has an individual and a collective purpose that enables the best way to co-operate and to flourish. This is a model for our relationships – when we fail to co-operate with, and respect, each other and with creation, it is then that we become divided and set against each other. In the story of Babel in Genesis 11: 1-9, we see this division not in God’s dispersal of his people but in their vision of a city divided from its Maker which is only restored at Pentecost whereby the Holy Spirit unites all people in their diversity of languages in Acts 2: 1-13.

So diversity in the Church is Scriptural and God is, by definition, an expression of three different beings operating together in unity. And God has designed his people so that we need everyone else in order to understand who he is: “for just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Romans 12:4-5. In the last book of the Bible, diversity is praised in Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb!”

These two images are models of diversity coming together to serve and praise God. Yet this does not just happen automatically. Restoration of a broken world is a daily habit. We must identify and actively combat the injustices that underline our divisions. True reconciliation means respecting one another in spite of, as well as because of, our differences, and promoting this respect over and above our individual preferences.

Belonging in Jesus

Jesus surrounded himself with people from all walks of life much to the horror of his disciples and the Pharisees, and he had different things to say to each of them. He loved them equally, and brought people together despite the dominant cultural, social, economic, and religious divides. He listened to the needs of those around him, and then acted to model their transformation as well as ease their burdens. Jesus throughout the Gospels shifts the focus from ‘I,’ to ‘we’, to ‘us’, in all our relationships. He reminds us that the private and the public are not different when it comes to justice and compassion.

The Church is not simply a collection of isolated individuals, all following their own spiritual path without reference to one another. While it’s true that each of us is called to respond to God at a personal level, the Church is a body that only thrives when it all works together. According to the New Testament the Church exists to announce to the world that Jesus is its Saviour. This is the “Good News,” and when it’s proclaimed it transforms people and societies – they belong to Christ. God redeems the world through Jesus and he redeems it through us every time we look at each person with the eyes of Christ and with the heart of God.

*Fleur Dorrell
Bible Society*

Collection Remittance

The total amount collected in your parish for Racial Justice Sunday should be sent to your Diocesan Finance Office, according to the procedures applicable in your diocese. It should be clearly identified as having been collected for 'Racial Justice Sunday 2018.'

Each Diocesan Finance Office will then forward the cumulative sum to the Bishops' Conference Secretariat. Please do not send money directly from your parish to the Bishops' Conference Secretariat.

If parishioners wish to make a donation by cheque, please kindly ask them to make cheques payable to your parish. These can then be paid-in and accounted for on your parish weekly income record as a donation to a second collection and incorporated within the total sum.

We also have an online donate facility at: <http://catholicnews.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2018>.

For legacies left to benefit the Racial Justice work of the Church, please contact fundraising@cbcew.org.uk.



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