

6 July

Despite being a little tired, on Monday night I settled down to watch the ABC program Q&A which was being televised from Geelong. I have a soft spot for Geelong having lived and worked there as a priest for two years. The panellists spoke a lot about major job losses, the closing of manufacturing which has been the life-blood of the city for decades, the challenge for low-skilled workers who have families and mortgages, the opportunities for new industries and the use of new technology, the tourism potential of the local area and the life-style which attracts so many people to the region. Geelong people are very proud and a little parochial but you can't help admire their passion.

As the program went on, the focus changed from politics, economics and job losses to the very sensitive issue of the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. A Sri Lankan man who feared persecution in being deported back to his country sadly took his own life and was subsequently buried from St Mary's church. On Q&A on Monday night, this issue touched a raw nerve. Because all politicians and panellists, in fact the whole country, was being challenged to reconsider this whole issue especially the hysteria and poisoned political atmosphere it seems to generate. As the mood of the audience shifted on Q&A over the asylum seeker issue, I remembered the famous words chiselled on the base of the Statue of Liberty in America, that great symbol of hope and freedom: 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free; the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!'

I mention this because we have exactly the same sentiments in today's Gospel. Jesus expresses a profound concern for the tired, the poor and the broken. 'Come to me all you who labour and are over-burdened and I will give you rest, for I am gentle and humble in heart'. We have this wonderful image of Jesus who carries us when we are tired, who heals us when we are broken, who sets us free from bondage and captivity. It is a classic example of the ministry of Jesus being directed to the poor, the broken and the marginalised. And all who call themselves disciples are called to do the same. This ministry is done in the name of justice, mercy and compassion. It is done because in the face of our suffering

brother and sister, we see the face of the crucified Christ. This weekend is also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday. We renew our commitment to work for justice and reconciliation with the original inhabitants of this country who have suffered for far too long.

In today's second reading, St Paul makes clear that when the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living in us, then new life abounds in us, creation is transformed, people are set free and the Gospel of Jesus brings hope and joy to the world. If our faith is not practical and transformative, then it remains a nice theory or a good idea. But Jesus did not die on the cross for a nice idea; he died on the cross to set us free and to transform the world.

The tone of political debate in this country needs to be transformed. Refugees and asylum seekers need to be loved and served, not marginalised and demonised. The Church too is undergoing its own transformation under the leadership of Pope Francis in terms of reminding us of the importance of humble service. According to Pope Francis, the Church is not a multinational corporation but a community of believers that transform the world through prayer and the gift of faith, who bring hope and joy in the midst of despair, who are called to bring the light of the risen Christ in the midst of darkness; a community of believers who love and serve the poor with compassion, faith and a generous heart.

This is the work of the kingdom of God present in our midst; it is the Gospel of Jesus, it is the mission of the Church, it is that radical and profound calling that comes to us in Baptism. And every time we enter the Church and make the sign of the cross with holy water, this grace of Baptism comes alive within us and sets our hearts aflame with the living word of God. This is what it means to be a people of the Spirit, guided by the Spirit of God who raised up Jesus from death and who in turn raises each of us and transforms the darkness around us by the hope and light of the risen Lord.

As we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we come before Jesus who carries us in our brokenness, who heals us in his gentleness and who sets us free by his love. As his disciples called in faith, we pray that we too may be this sign of hope and life for the world.