

Sunday 26 August 2018: Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lord, whom shall we go to? You have the words of everlasting life



...Today's Gospel first records the response of those in the crowd who are described as Jesus' disciples. Just as the larger crowd had struggled with Jesus' teaching, these disciples also cannot accept Jesus' words. Jesus is said to know about their murmuring. He responds by acknowledging their unbelief and by reiterating that only those chosen by the Father will follow Jesus to the end. John's Gospel reports that many of those who had been Jesus' disciples ceased to follow him at this point. The number of people following Jesus dwindled from a crowd of more than 5,000 to only 12 people. And it is to these Twelve that Jesus now turns his attention...

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01 September: World Day of Prayer for Creation

In 2016 Pope Francis nominated September 1 as a day of prayer for creation in the Catholic Church. His initiative was of more than simply Catholic interest. He wanted to enlist Catholics into a universal movement of passionate concern for the environment of which we form part. He demanded that care for the environment stand at the centre of economics, politics, social interactions and human reflection.

In the day of prayer, too, he wanted to bring out the links between concern for people disadvantaged by inequality and greed in the world, contemplative wonder at the beauty and complexity of creation, and the vision of just relationships between human beings and with the environment. Together these help to shape a world fit to pass on to our grandchildren.

The day also encourages us to take stock and to refocus our attention. In Australia, as in most other nations, respect for the environment is regarded as a good thing but is not a high priority.

People accept regulations, targets and decisions as long as they do not impede business as usual or interfere with the unrestrained making of wealth. Instead of seeing in seeing the human and financial costs of environmental change as matters to be addressed while making the changes necessary to protect our world, politicians follow voters in seeing them as reasons for doing nothing.

Pope Francis insists that care for the environment and human welfare go together. The reason why people are made poor, held in poverty and ground down in poverty is that other people are determined to make profit regardless of its effect on others. They also treat the environment as dirt to be turned into money. Because the relationships between people and the environment are delicate and interlocking, abusive relationships motivated by competitive greed destroy both people and the environment of which they are part.

Because our world and its people depend on just relationships we cannot guarantee the future of the world simply through better technology and organisation. Certainly we do need to design a more equal society, find better ways of generating energy and controlling emissions, and protect people affected by the changes those things will need.

But more deeply we need to change our own hearts so that we value and treasure the world enough to want to protect it and to support governments that promise to do so. That change is built on reverence towards other people including strangers, and towards the environment of which we are part. Our work at Jesuit Social Services with vulnerable young people who are often feared by society depends on it. A change of heart affects the networks of relationships that compose our own lives and so spreads through society. When through us it spreads through the church, it become a fire that transforms the world.

Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ