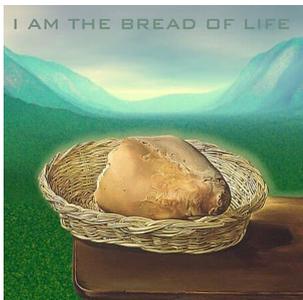


## Sunday 12 August 2018: Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



*I am the living bread come down from heaven*

...Today's Gospel begins with a report that the Jews complained about Jesus' claims regarding his identity. They knew his family, and they knew he was the son of Joseph. They could not comprehend what Jesus meant when he said that he came down from heaven. Jesus responds to the complaints by saying that only those who are chosen by God will recognize him as the one that God sent. This is a recurring theme in John's Gospel, that God has chosen those who will have faith in Jesus...

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## 12 August: International Youth Day

Young people are endlessly fascinating for the ageing. Sometimes they come to our attention simply for looking good, and at other times for being exceptionally good at pursuits that demands high skills: football or gymnastics, for example. And sometimes we are drawn to them simply because they are young and have their lives in front of them. We are correspondingly moved when they fall seriously ill or die before their time.

More rarely we notice people who are very good in the face of great pressure. Many of us were moved by the Thai boys trapped in a cave. We sympathised with them in their terrible predicament, but were also deeply impressed by their resilience and care for one another in the face of darkness, separation from family and their inevitable fear that they would not be rescued but would die slowly in the cave. And who could not admire their coach, who led them safely to higher ground, went without food in order to keep them alive, apologised to the parents for being the cause of their plight, and insisted that he be the last to be rescued?

These boys have become heroes. But others have been trashed. With an election coming in Victoria, at least, criminal behaviour by some few young people have led to young Africans being targeted and politicians competing with one another to devise harsh penalties regardless

of the background and the circumstances. The pressure is to put children into cages, not to release them. It sits ill with the theme of World Youth Day 2018: findings safe spaces for young people

The interest in young people and the way it can turn so quickly from total sympathy to total condemnation may betray a deeper anxiety about them. Because young people are the future of our society we constantly take their temperature to see that all is well. Our anxiety at youth behaving badly shows that our interest in them is serious. When we are anxious, however, we often look for a quick fix without addressing what the causes of what concerns us. We see this in the response to lawbreaking by young people in Australia. The media act as bellows to turn the embers of anxiety into flames; governments placate the anxiety by imposing increasingly heavy penalties on them, so destining many young people to a lifetime in adult gaols. That is irrational and destructive.

It is better to acknowledge our anxiety, reflect carefully on the causes of the situations that provoke it, and deal with those causes. In our policy research and advocacy at Jesuit Social Services we try to address these issues. Young people who act unlawfully have often suffered traumatic experiences in early childhood, lived in broken or dysfunctional families, experienced failure and isolation in schools and been unable to find work. Those factors need to be addressed early by support for families under stress, offering young people good role models, support them with programs to help them benefit from education and find work, and so on.

Nurturing young people is about making safe places. Places of imprisonment are never safe. Neither do they provide lasting safety for the community.

*Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ*