



Justice

In 2016, Pope Francis declared *Care for our Common Home* a new work of mercy, one that requires “simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” and “makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world”.

Francis’ call to counter all forms of violence and exploitation and to act in ways that lead to flourishing of life is fundamentally a call to justice which envelops both the concepts of systemic or structural justice and right relationships. Furthermore, in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, Francis challenges us to recognise the interconnectedness of all creation and to understand that justice is concerned with the welfare of all the Earth community, including Earth itself.

Justice for the most vulnerable was a frequent message in the prophetic tradition of Israel. For example, Isaiah urges his hearers to “seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17). Why highlight orphans and widows? In the patriarchal structure of that time, widows and orphans fell through the cracks in the system, making them extremely vulnerable.

Jesus begins his ministry, according to Luke, by drawing on the prophetic tradition and announcing that his mission will be to bring good news to the poorest and to proclaim release to all those held captive or being broken by unjust structures (Luke 4:16-21). Henceforth, justice for the vulnerable and the challenging of oppressive structures were to be key elements of his ministry.



Following the example of Jesus, Catherine McAuley identified and responded to the needs of the poorest in 19th century Dublin – girls without access to an education, unskilled young women at risk of abuse from their employers, homeless women, sick people in their homes or on the street, and cholera sufferers in hospital. In their activities within the House of Mercy and in their walking the streets to meet those in need, Catherine and the first Sisters sought justice for all whom they encountered.

As well as looking outwards, Catherine and the early sisters practised justice towards each other, endeavouring to model right relationship, as is illustrated by the following statements from Catherine:

“The sun never, I believe, went down on our anger”

(Letter to Elizabeth Moore, January 13, 1839)

“Be careful not to make too many laws, for if you draw the string too tight it will break”

(from The Limerick Manuscript)

For justice to flourish in our Mercy ministries, it is important to monitor for any systemic bias, violence or exploitation and remove these injustices from our regulations, policies and practices, so that our structures are life-giving. In our daily actions, justice calls us to right relationship with our God and with the entire Earth community. In particular, we are called to listen deeply and to respond alongside those who have been rendered poor or who are most at risk of falling through the cracks in today’s systems.

Justice



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Reflecting

Find a quiet space and make a conscious decision to 'slow down' for a while.

- ▶ When you think about your personal experience of 'justice in action', what comes to mind?
- ▶ What attitudes do you think cause people to behave unjustly towards others?
- ▶ What 'checks and balances' do you have in place to monitor your practice of justice?
- ▶ What are some of the personal costs of being treated unjustly?

2

Connecting

Re-read the reflection on Justice. Consider reading it aloud and pausing briefly at a significant word or phrase.

- ▶ In what ways do the scripture passages and the words of Catherine McAuley and Pope Francis included in this reflection challenge you to a deeper understanding of justice?

You are invited to read the following texts:

Isaiah 58:6-8a

Luke 4:16-21

The call to justice for all people and for our vulnerable earth community is a recurring theme.

- ▶ What call is coming to you as you ponder these extracts?



3

Responding

Justice is the basis of being in 'right relationship' with all who share our common home. Reflect on your daily interactions and the systems which operate in your workplace or ministry.

- ▶ In what ways is justice a hallmark of your interactions and of the systems within which you work?
- ▶ How would you go about ensuring that justice is a strong component of your workplace culture?
- ▶ How could you use your skills, knowledge and influence to advocate consistently for justice?

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Re-imagining

Think about the founders of your organisation. Their dreams, their vision and passion for mercy and justice are the foundations on which you and your ministry colleagues continue to build.

Imagine Catherine McAuley or another founder is accompanying you on a walk around your workplace and ministry. The conversation turns to justice issues in Australia, especially in its laws and systems.

- ▶ What examples would you share about justice being 'alive and well'? What ongoing struggles for justice would you identify, especially for the most vulnerable?
- ▶ What do you hear them saying to you about continuing the dream for a better future, one where justice is a reality for all who share our common home?

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