

Becoming a Just Person – like Jesus

On August 21, 2022, the Church celebrates Justice Sunday. When we talk about justice, what comes to our mind? We usually think of our rights. Rarely have we thought about our responsibilities or our duties. Justice is often defined as getting one's dues. When one does not receive his/her rights, such aggrieved persons appeal to the concerned authority to seek justice. This sort of justice is individual justice. There is also another type of justice, viz. Social Justice, where the rights and responsibility of the whole society becomes important. Jesus' mission envisages both individual justice and social justice.

Reading: Let us read the Gospel passage from Luke 4:16-25. This passage gives us the manifesto of Jesus' ministry. Jesus made a preferential option for the poor – the blind, the prisoners, and the oppressed, and at the same time, He announces the Jubilee year, though it was not the 50th year. His ministry therefore would be (as Luke expounds) for this class of people. The unjust structures would be broken and a new command of Love will be seen through His words and actions.

Let us look at two events from the Gospel.

1. I invite you to read the Gospel of John 8:1-11 - Woman caught in adultery (Pause for Reflection). I invite you to share any incident where women have become victims of male domination or gender bias.

Jesus renders Justice: Jesus looks at the evil intention of the Pharisees who caught this woman “red-handed” in the very act of adultery. Can adultery be committed by a woman alone, by herself? Where was the man? Why was he not brought before Jesus? Jesus could see through and through, and so he passes a simple yet profound judgment: “Let anyone among you who has no sin be the first to throw a stone at her. Jesus does not condemn, but offers her Mercy.

2. I invite you to read the Gospel of Matthew 20:1-16 - Labourers in the vineyard: The parable tells us that the employer made an agreement with one group of workers, and subsequently employs others at different times, even at the 11th hour, but pays them the same amount. Was the employer just in doing what he did? If yes or no, why? (Reflect and share your insights)

The mission of Jesus was clear. He chose to work with the poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed, and rendered justice to all, granting them mercy and forgiveness, breaking barriers of Hatred and building bridges of Love. There is no justice without love and mercy. Jesus followed the laws which were good for society (Jesus paid taxes). He broke the oppressive laws (Laws of the Sabbath, some liturgical laws, speaking to women in public places e.g. the Samaritan woman at the well, eating with so called sinners and tax collectors) and encouraged laws which were good e.g. he encouraged the disciples to walk one mile extra, forgiving generously, without counting the cost.)

Jesus went about doing good. He confronted the powerful – both religious as well as political leaders of his time – and accepted crucifixion. He confronted the guard who hit him. “If I have said something wrong, tell me; If I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me? (John 18:23).

Conclusion

The one who stands for truth and the rights of people will be persecuted. Yet we need to raise our voice against all atrocities. The powerful - political and religious leaders - will continue to oppress the poor marginalised. You and I need to be the voice of the voiceless. Shall we remain silent? Will Jesus appreciate His chosen ones remaining silent amidst oppression? Fortunately, in modern times, we have had prophets who, like Jesus, stood for the rights of the oppressed, poor, tribals, migrants, and women – Saint Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who was shot dead while celebrating the Eucharist, and Fr Stan Swamy, a Jesuit priest, human rights defender who died for his people, encouraging them till the end. Jesus told His disciples, “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.” (John 15:20).

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we work for Justice and Peace in our Small Christian Communities?
2. How can we strengthen our Mohalla Committees and ALMs so that we could bring peace and harmony?
3. What can we do so that **Truth alone triumphs - SATYAMEVA JAYATE?**

Fr Lancy Pinto

Parish Priest, St Michael Church, Mahim

Chairperson, Commission for Justice and Peace

Coordinator, Federation for Centres for Community Organization