



## **Lift Up the Cross: Poverty, Faith & Catholic Social Teaching**

---

In preparation for World Youth Day 2008, the World Youth Day Cross and Icon began their journey around Australia. An enormous variety of events were held in different parishes to welcome the Cross and Icon. On 10 July 2007 the North Harbour Parish of the Broken Bay Diocese held a social justice forum with the theme *Lift Up the Cross: Making Poverty History at Home and Abroad*. This reflection was prepared as a panel input for an open forum session. In it Sandie Cornish looks at the connections between the Cross, poverty and Catholic Social Teaching.

### **Jesus' Mission**

What is the connection between the World Youth Day Cross, making poverty history, and Catholic Social Teaching?

I think the answer is bound up with responding to Jesus' invitation to join him in his mission.

I worked for fourteen years in the national justice and peace agencies of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and then coordinated an Asian region human rights organization based out of Hong Kong. In this time I saw a lot of good hearted activists burn out, or become disillusioned and give up.

I began to notice that those who were able to stick with it for the long haul, to maintain hope even in the face of calamities and great evil, to continue to love and laugh rather than becoming bitter and cynical, these special people had deep spiritual lives.

In the last few years, helping people to 'join the dots' between our faith and our action in the world - to embrace a spirituality of justice - has become the focus of my work.

So what does it mean for us today to be on mission with Jesus?

Lots of organizations, from fast food outlets to major banks, display their mission statements prominently. Here is Jesus' mission statement:

**The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me,  
for the Lord has anointed me.  
The Lord has sent me to bring  
the good news to the poor,  
to proclaim liberty to captives  
and to the blind new sight,  
to set the downtrodden free,  
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.**

*(Luke 4:18-19)*

### **Joining Jesus' Mission, Carrying the Cross Today**

Obviously efforts to make poverty history, here in Australia and around the world, are part of bringing good news to the poor.

People can be captives in many ways. People who are the victims of trafficking in persons are literally captives, and we can join campaigns to free them from modern forms of slavery.

We can also be captives in less obvious ways. We may be slaves to materialism, consumerism, selfishness or ideology. God's love liberates us from these false gods. God loves each of us no matter what we own, what we wear, how we look or how we vote. We find meaning and direction by responding to God's love by loving God and our neighbours.

We don't have to be literally blind not to see. There are things we'd rather not see, and we may even turn our heads in order not to see. Jesus calls us to see the world with his eyes. Do we see each other as sisters and brothers in Jesus? Do we see the spark of the divine in each and every other person? If we see things in this way, we will naturally want to work towards the good of every person and of every group in our society.

Who are the downtrodden in our society, the ones who bear the brunt of injustice? Can we stop treading on them? Can we prevent them from being trodden on?

Jesus' mission statement gives special attention to the crucified people. If we are his followers, we too should give priority attention to those who carry heavy crosses. This is what it means to lift up the cross.

Jesus is doing his mission as he carries his cross. Will we carry that cross with him, not just in a procession today, but in the way we live our lives every day?

We can do it. We aren't the first ones to try and we won't be the last.

## Tradition

World Youth Day helps us to see and feel the reality of being part of a massive, international movement. It is also a movement through time. We are part of something really big and intergenerational and we can draw on the experience and reflection of generations of Christians all over the world. We don't start from scratch, even when we are facing a new issue.

We call it tradition, and one way in which we pass it on is through Church teaching.

The Church has a lot of wisdom to offer concerning work for justice and peace in the world. This part of our tradition is known as Catholic Social Teaching. You might not hear it talked about in homilies very often, but it is a very important resource which we can draw on to help us to respond to issues in our society.

## Catholic Social Teaching

One of my current projects is a website that sets out to make these teachings more accessible. The website is [www.faithdoingjustice.com.au](http://www.faithdoingjustice.com.au) and you can sign up for a free monthly electronic newsletter from there. You can also use the forum to ask questions and explore ideas with others.

I encourage you to get to know about Catholic Social Teaching – it will encourage, support, guide and sustain you as you lift up the cross with Jesus.

## For Reflection & Discussion

- Read how Jesus describes his mission in Luke 4:18 – 19. How would you describe your mission as a follower of Jesus?
- Just as love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable, the service of faith and the promotion of justice are linked. How are faith and justice linked in the way that you live, work, and worship?
- Do you have a favourite image of Jesus and the cross? Perhaps it is a painting of Jesus carrying the cross in a series of the Stations of the Cross in your parish church. Perhaps it is a sculptural representation of Jesus being crucified. You might wear a crucifix around your neck. How does this image or representation speak to you? What does the Cross mean to you?
- Who are the people who carry heavy crosses in your community? Can you think of any ways in which you, by yourself or working with others, might bring good news to them?
- Big events like World Youth Day can help us to understand that we are part of something much bigger. Our faith links us to literally millions of other people. Are there other, perhaps more subtle or mundane, ways in which you experience a feeling of being linked with others in your faith and action for a more just and peaceful world?
- What does the word tradition mean to you? Does it seem old fashioned and negative, or does it evoke positive feelings about valuable things worth handing on?
- Have you ever heard of Catholic Social Teaching? What do you think it is, and how might it help you to take action for a more just and peaceful world?
- Visit [www.faithdoingjustice.com.au](http://www.faithdoingjustice.com.au) and use the email form on the contact us page to let the site editor know whether you found the site useful or not.