



True hospitality demands justice

On July 1 the Australian Border Force Act 2015 came into force. On the same day 40 people who were working in Australian detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island signed an open letter of protest to the Prime Minister and Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. They attacked the provision that forbids them to speak publicly about abuses of human rights. The penalty for doing so is two years in jail. They also dared the Government to prosecute them for writing the letter.

As a Catholic priest I all too slowly became aware of the defects in church governance and culture that led to so many children being abused and the crimes against them being kept secret. So I am horrified that the Government should impose this culture of silence on detention centres by legislating to ensure that sexual abuse and other crimes are kept in-house. I have learned how foolish people were to believe us when we said to them, 'You can trust us, we are the church'. I have still less reason to believe government ministers when they say, 'You can trust us to act justly, we are the government'.

In Australia people who come by boat to seek protection from persecution have long been vilified. Recent legislation allows officers in detention centres to use whatever force they themselves deem necessary to maintain order. They will effectively be judges of their own cases. This confers on them a dangerous degree of impunity. Taken together with the imposition of secrecy and the widespread antipathy to asylum seekers, this measure removes all the effective hindrances to the development of a brutal culture.

(In the past) brave people risked their lives or freedom when telling the truth to power. Osip Mandel'stam, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Nelson Mandela and Pablo Neruda are some of the best known faces of resistance to brutality. The signatories of the open letter follow honorably in their own small way in this tradition.

(We should remember that) for the Nazi State its comforting irony lay in the knowledge that, if it worked to denigrate its victims, to impose silence around its security apparatus and to give its officials impunity, it would be made free from all that waffle about decency, justice and respect.

As we read the letter of the 40 just people, that bears thinking about...

from Andrew Hamilton SJ *Eureka Street* 5 July 2015

When the Lord spoke to me, a spirit entered into me. The Lord said, "I am sending you to the people. They have transgressed against me. I am sending you to them to say: 'Whether you hear or refuse to hear, know that a prophet is among you.'"

Ezek. 2: 2-5

Those who are hard of heart and who have turned away from God need to be reminded of what their God expects of them.



Jesus had deep compassion for the needs of people. He healed them, fed them, taught them. Now he needs us to continue this work. We are called to help people find and experience the truth and love that God gives in Jesus. This is a call to serve and build God's kingdom.

A church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what gospel is that?

Blessed Oscar Romero

The one who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as the one who helps to perpetrate it. The one who accepts evil without protesting against it is really co-operating with it.

Martin Luther King



In the sixth century Rome had overspent, overreached and overlooked the immigrants on the border who were waiting to pour through the system like a sieve. Rome, the invincible had been sacked. In our own world, the headlines are in our paper too, and few, if any, are reading them.

But in the sixth century, one person, Benedict of Nursia, resolved to change the system, not by competing with it to be bigger, better or more successful but by eroding its credibility. This one person decided to change people's opinions about what life had to be by himself living otherwise, by refusing to accept the moral standards around him, by forming other people into organised communities to do the same: to outlaw slavery where they were; to devote themselves to the sharing of goods; to commit themselves to care for the earth; to teach and model a new perspective on our place in the universe.

Joan Chittister, from *The Radical Christian Life*, Liturgical Press

In what direction does a commitment to hospitality lead us?

What challenges are to be found along this road?

As a KM ministry, what can we say to those who deny justice to the vulnerable?

Let us pray,

God of justice, we know that we often fail to see the injustices around us.

Help us to look at our world with compassionate astuteness. Help us to speak truth and do what is right.

May we not passively accept any evil we see in daily life.

Lord, we pray that we might one day abide in your light.

Amen