

*JUSTICE AND PEACE NETWORK  
ON-LINE CONFERENCE*

*18<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2020*

This week a BBC reporter commented on the Corona virus with these words:

The England that entered this pandemic is not the England  
that will emerge from it.

Sadly, I said to myself,

The English Catholic Church that entered this pandemic  
IS the Church that will emerge from it.

I have not detected any signs that we realize we are in a new place and a new time. Sadly, we have not and are not learning that God is calling us to fresh fields and pastures new. Cardinal Vincent Nichols informed all clergy that we can return to our churches in small numbers and with an abbreviated liturgy. He announced that in these days of cut-down Masses we must leave out the Prayers of the Faithful. The People of God are always at the bottom of the ecclesial pile.

I wish to say first some words about what our Bible has to say about “the kingdom of heaven”, as St Matthew names what the rest of the New Testament calls “the kingdom of God”. This has featured of the last few Sunday’s Gospel readings. Then a brief reflection on Justice and Peace.

And finally, some reflections on the online churches that have, thank God, sprung up all over this green and pleasant a land.

#### KINGDOM OF GOD/HEAVEN

If I asked a Sunday congregation what is the message of Jesus, would I be greeted with a loud shout “the kingdom of God”? Yet all the Gospels and almost every document in the New Testament declare it to be so.

I know that “the kingdom of God” is the most important idea in the New Testament because Jesus says so, in all four Gospels. The first Gospel to be written was the Gospel according to St Mark. He summarises the Jesus project as provided by Jesus himself:

*Now after John [the Baptist] was handed over [arrested], Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.*

*and saying,*

*“The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God** is at hand”.*

Mark 1:15

The phrase means that in Jesus, in his person and in his words, we see God’s design for creation. We see what the world would be like were it totally conformed to God’s wishes. As the jargon says, what Jesus meant was,

**God rules!**  
**O.K?**

What would the world be like if God's rule ran throughout the universe?  
The answer is Justice and Peace. That is the destiny of humanity. But  
what is Justice and what is Peace?

To answer this we need to know WHAT God is. In Psalm 136, the poet  
calls on all who pray to give thanks to God for "God is good". The Psalm  
begins,

*Give thanks to the LORD,*

*for he is good ...*

Why give thanks? What is God good for?

The answer is,

*... his steadfast love endures forever.*

The poet runs through the history of the people in relation to God and  
finds 26 reasons for declaring,

*his steadfast love endures forever.*

Twenty-six times!

Psalm 136 is a psalm for slow learners.

The Hebrew word in our Bible, *Hesed*, needs two English words to  
translate it precisely. God's *hesed*, God's love, endures forever. It is the  
only love that has no beginning, no end. God's love is not stuttering-  
stammering love. *Hesed*, steadfast love, is what God is or who God is.

How do we see this love in our world? We see steadfast love in our world when we see what God DOES. What God does is Justice and Peace.

Justice and Peace in Jewish and Christian speak is not what *we* do. It is what the God, who is Love, does. God's justice is not making sure that everyone is equal before the law. God's justice is not making sure that there is not one law for the rich and another for the poor. God's justice is not seeing that everyone gets a square deal.

God's justice is better understood as God's righteousness. The Hebrew word **šādīq** means "true", in the sense of "the right thing", "the right way", "the appropriate action". It is used in the Bible according to circumstances. So it is said of a king:

*Behold! a king will reign in righteousness,  
and princes will rule in justice.*

Isaiah 32:1

But more often than not what princes do is,

*... you trample on the poor,  
you exact taxes on grain,  
you build houses hewn out of stone ...*

Amos 5:11

Kings and ordinary people are expected to have concern for their neighbour, to fulfil the demands of God's covenant. What God screams to every heart is,

*... let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Amos 5:24

Doing the right thing, doing right in this world is doing according to the word of God. Everyone is called to live righteously, to live justice, to do what is right as God sees it:

*Listen to me,  
you who pursue righteousness,  
you who seek the LORD:  
look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
and from the quarry from which you were dug.*

Isaiah 51:1

Humanity is quarried out of God. Humanity must act justly, must be righteous. For to this we are all called:

*... to make wilderness into Eden,  
deserts like the garden of the LORD;  
joy and gladness will be found there,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song.*

Isaiah 51:3

To mirror God's steadfast love in the world is to teach the world to sing.

#### PEACE

The word "peace", shalôm in Hebrew, fundamentally means "wholeness". The Bible reviews and reflects on everything that makes people whole. Two points - and these are generalisations that need much teasing out.

Among the blessings of Shalôm, are

#### SECURITY:

*God has not forsaken us in our slavery,  
but has extended to us his steadfast love  
... to give us protection.*

Ezra 9:9

#### PROSPERITY:

*For there shall be a sowing of peace.  
The vine shall give of her fruit,  
and the earth shall give its produce ...*

Zechariah 8:12

#### TRUTH:

*These are the things that you shall do:  
Speak the truth to one another;*

*render in your gates judgements that are true,  
and make peace.*

Zechariah 8:18

RIGHTEOUSNESS

*Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.*

Psalm 85:10

A GIFT OF GOD

*May the LORD give strength to his people!  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!*

Psalm 29:11

*Let me hear what God will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his saints;  
let them not turn back to folly.*

Psalm 85:8

*O LORD,*

*you will ordain peace for us!*

Isaiah 26:12

The truest ordination, the most sacramental of all ordinations, is the ordination of the world to peace.

The New Testament is a riot of peace, of peace-making, of living in peace, of giving and receiving peace. A sentence we all know from our Crib may stand for all words of peace:

*Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace, good will among all people.*

#### THE FUTURE

Just two remarks on the future:

We cannot dismiss the online churches that have received the breath of the Holy Spirit in these troubled days. People have gathered on-line and broken together “God’s holy words”, as St Francis called our Bible. And did not their hearts burn within them as Jesus in their midst talked to them, and opened to them the Scriptures (see Luke 24:32)? These churches must not be shut because other church doors open.

Secondly, as a retired priest, I find myself celebrating with God’s people in a variety of parishes. I am usually asked to hear confessions before Mass. I am always amazed that four or five people come to confess. Yet everybody, or almost everybody, receives Communion. What is that saying to us?

The official book on *The Rite of Penance* offers a service of General Confession and Absolution. This is a truly enriching sacramental opportunity. It brings a community together to listen to God’s word, to



meditate on our calling our calling together to live as Jesus lived, as God demands of us. Together, as a community, we can repent of our social sins, our failures to live justice and do peace. We can together make a firm purpose of amendment, and determine before God, as a parish, as a house-church, whatever, wherever, and receive a renewal of the Holy Spirit to gospel the world as Jesus did. We can stop being tiny, individual candles, and become a huge Easter Candle, lighting our world along the path of peace. General Penance is a sacrament of encouragement and strength to be together a voice for God in the world. This is one of the many pastoral ways these young on-line churches can empower us all to create a new future, full of grace and truth, full of God's justice and God's peace.<sup>1</sup>

And I never mentioned the ordination of women and married men. These are matters crying out for God's justice and God's peace!

Dr Joseph O'Hanlon.

18<sup>th</sup> July, 2020

Note:

The words *just, justice, justify, justification* occur 381 times in the Bible.

The words *peace, peaceful, peacefully* occur 384 times in the Bible.

The words *righteous, righteousness, righteously* occur 563 times in the Bible.

[English Standard Version]

'JUSTICE AND PEACE NETWORK ON-LINE CONFERENCE' 18<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2020  
Copyright ©2020 by Dr. Joseph O'Hanlon

---

