

DEEDS, NOT WORDS, TRUE MEASURE OF OUR WORTH

ONE of his best gifts to us all this year has been the decision by Pope Francis to inaugurate an annual World Day of the Poor. Behind the initiative is the pope's desire to keep alive the spirit of his special Year of Mercy. This year's celebration on November 19 may have crept up unnoticed until it was upon us. Some 4000 homeless people were invited to the Mass in St Peter's Basilica, and many of them to the lunches that followed at venues around the Vatican, including 1500 who sat down with the pope as his special guests.

But there will be no excuse for our not anticipating the event in future years, pencilled into our calendars for the penultimate Sunday of the church's liturgical year, with definite plans to match our talk of a preferential option for the poor with appropriate deeds.

Indeed, actions rather than words hold the key to what Francis has to say about this event. "Love has no alibi," he insists in his message, and he challenges us to ensure that the words we spend on talking about care for the poor are matched by concrete deeds.

With Catherine McAuley etched so deeply in our whakapapa or spiritual genealogy, this is a challenge we cannot ignore. Her famous insistence was that "the poor need help today, not next week." She could never rest content, until she knew that everything that could be attempted on their behalf had been done. There is a sense through the whole of her life story of not wanting to leave a stone unturned on behalf of the poor. "God knows I would rather be cold and hungry, than the poor should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford," she wrote when a grave injustice forced her to withdraw her Sisters from Kingstown. "But we have done all that belonged to us to do, and even more than the circumstances justified."

It's the hope of Pope Francis that from here on, Christian communities and organisations will anticipate the World Day of the Poor in future by planning for the event, using the months and weeks before the due date by identifying the target of their concern and determining in detail the nature of their response. "I invite the whole church, and men and women of good will everywhere, to turn their gaze on this day to all those who stretch out their hands and plead for our help and solidarity."

More than anything else, says the pope, the day is meant to encourage us "to react against a culture of discard and waste, and to embrace the culture of encounter." He hopes that in the week before the next World Day of the Poor, we will make



Pope Francis serves two of his guests at the lunch in the Vatican to mark the first World Day of the Poor on November 19. 'In the poor we touch the body of Christ,' said the pope in his message for the day.

every effort "to create moments of encounter and friendship, solidarity and concrete assistance." Sharing with the poor "enables us to understand the deepest truth of the gospel," says Pope Francis. "The poor are not a problem; they are a resource from which to draw, as we strive to accept and practise in our lives the essence of the gospel."

The need here for Mercy people is to be quite strategic. Who are the poor who are stretching out their hands to us for help and solidarity? What are their names, and how do we get to know them better? What are they asking of us, and how might we best respond? How can we involve them in helping us to plan an encounter on Sunday 18 November 2018, the next World Day of the Poor?

– Dennis Horton

CREATING A PEACEFUL WORLD BY ACTING JUSTLY

The last page in this series has been saved to feature the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16, the last of eight among a total of 17 named by Mercy International Association as especially relevant to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy. An appropriate theme as we prepare once more to celebrate Christmas, its focus is on promoting peace and justice, and building social institutions that are accountable and inclusive.



Mercy International describes this as the central, transformative goal, in a [leaflet](#) to highlight this topic. "It addresses violence, war, injustice, corruption within national institutions, human trafficking, and exploitation of peoples and Earth." The call to collective action which Mercy makes to us all is to work with others in challenging violence and institutional abuse, advocating for an end to human trafficking and exploitation of the vulnerable, and campaigning for renewable energy and for ensuring that fossil fuels remain buried in the ground or under the sea.

It was Pope Paul VI who wrote in his message for World Day of Peace in 1972 that if we want real peace, we need to work for justice. The focus for Pope Francis in [his message for January 1](#) next year is on migrants and refugees – those whom he calls "seekers of somewhere to live in peace" in our world, currently over 250 million migrants, of whom 22.5 million are refugees. The word from Francis is that we should be opening doors, rather than building fences or walls. He uses four words to outline the kind of response we should be making to this human crisis of enormous global proportions - 'welcoming', 'protecting', 'promoting' and 'integrating'.

Part of the challenge we face is to find ways of raising our collective voice, to remind the politicians and decision-makers that there is a moral truth beneath the crisis faced by asylum-seekers and refugees, as well as those whose homes are being destroyed by climate change and rising sea levels. They are members of the one human family, looking for a share in what God intends us all to share as our common home.

Advocating and articulating that message is something which our own Sisters of Mercy did last month, joining their counterparts in Australia and New Guinea in a statement on the plight of

600 refugees in Manus Island. They appealed to Australian parliamentarians to bring the refugees without further delay to Australia, and commended the New Zealand Government for its offer to resettle some of them in this country. "We Sisters stand ready to provide assistance where possible," the statement declared. "It is time that decency prevailed and Australia lived up to its obligation and long-held

reputation as a fair, just and compassionate nation." There is no knowing where a collective voice may go, or what change it may accomplish. One has only to consider how the recent #Me too campaign, of women standing up against men in positions of power who have abused and violated them, has affected the show-biz world and changed its culture for the better.

Our passport to paradise

*E Te Atua atawhai
Kaitiaki o nga hunga rawa kore –
God of mercy,
Saviour of the poor and powerless:
World Day of the Poor
is the latest gift from Pope Francis,
to be a once-a-year reminder
of your constant call to
turn fine words into deeds.*

*In Christ Jesus, born poor
to save us by his ultimate act
of self-emptying on the cross,
we find the true measure
of his redeeming love –
a willingness to lose all, to save all.*

*Today we also recall
Catherine McAuley's insistence
that the poor need help today,
not next week.*

*With eyes of faith, she saw
that in reaching out to touch the poor
it was Christ himself whom she embraced.*

*Help us by your grace to know
as Pope Francis reminds us
that the poor are our passport to paradise
and that only what we invest in love remains,
when the rest of our strivings will vanish. Amen.*