



Refugee and Migrant Sunday Liturgy

29th August 2004

On Refugee and Migrant Sunday, we join hands in praying for and expressing our solidarity with refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in Australia and in our global community.

IDEAS FOR USING THE LITURGY:

1). Photocopy the liturgy for congregation members so that everyone can participate as community and in unity with Christians across Australia. Download from:

www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees

2). Get people of different ages, gender and ethnicity to read the Scriptures, prayers and Act of Commitment.

3). Form a group to adapt the liturgy to suit your congregation. You may use your singing group or choir to participate in the hymns or songs in keeping with the theme 'Building our Future Together'.

4) Sunflowers (fresh or artificial), sunflower or mixed* seeds, a filled watering can, an empty pot plant, a small bag of soil and a bottle of liquid fertiliser can be used to illustrate the theme *Building Our Future Together*. Building peace and a future together is like tending a garden: we need to prepare the soil, plant the seeds, water and keep them nourished so that they flourish. We must even talk to them with kind and gentle words of encouragement.

*Mixed seeds can be used to show how many different flowers can grow together, nourished by the same soil to produce a wide variety of colours and shapes.

The sunflower weaves Refugee and Migrant Sunday with the Decade to Overcome

Refugee and Migrant Sunday Education Kit 2004

Violence in Australia program 'Cultivating Peace – Turn to the Sun'. Web reference:

[www.ncca.org.au/dov/reosurces/turn_to_the_sun_\(dov_kit_2\)](http://www.ncca.org.au/dov/reosurces/turn_to_the_sun_(dov_kit_2)) In doing this, we are urging congregations to be mindful of the need to cultivate peace in our society today.

5). To conclude the service, handout sunflower seeds for congregation members to plant at home or form a procession to be led out of church behind the newly planted pot, signaling the congregation's commitment to build our future together. The plant could then be put in the garden or given to someone to care for until it grows. Later, you may also wish to celebrate its growth as a reminder.

6). Get the Sunday school children, the youth group or the Social Justice Committee in your congregation to cut out newspaper and magazine items on refugees, asylum seekers (particularly positive projects such as those in Young NSW etc). Place them in the foyer, church hall or with the symbols to inform people of the challenges refugees, migrants and asylum seekers face in our society.

Web Resources: www.acmro.catholic.org.au
www.ncca.org.au/christian_world_service/at_work_with_refugees

Homily Resources: www.pastornet.net.au/jmm/

Reflection on Common Readings: Luke 14: 7-14

Australia is a first world country and as such is identified with wealth, economic prosperity, social status, privileged life. It is a country that has a lot to offer. Alternatively, as a young country we have much to gain from those who come with a desire to transplant their lives, culture and experience and build a new future alongside Australians.

Our reading this morning from Luke has Jesus invited to share at the table with a leading Pharisee – most probably a man of wealth and importance. In the time of Jesus, the rich were mainly the politically powerful, the high priests, the aristocracy, the merchant class and the big landowners. To be rich meant not only one had money to live in luxury; it also implied social status and privilege. Being rich also gave power to oppress the poor. However, Jesus was not born among the rich but the poor. By identifying with those with least privileges Jesus brought salvation to humankind and called his disciples to take on the same value system he had. We see this expressed in the reading from Luke and the story concerning James and John (see Mark 9:35). He said to them "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

QUESTIONS:

In this setting, Jesus tells two parables that teach us about a more appropriate way to find seats at the table. We all would like to sit near the head of the table, but Jesus said to the guests: Go to the lowest seat rather than rush to take a place near those of importance at the top of the table. He says we are better off taking a more humble place at the table: It is better for the host to come and say "Friend, move up higher" which will be a great honour to you in the presence of the other guests rather than immediately going to the top of the table and having the host come and move you down so that someone of greater importance can take your seat.

Jesus then addressed his host. When you provide a meal, don't invite those who can repay you but invite instead the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. Because they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the Resurrection of the Just.

This teaching from Jesus concerning 'placement at the table' and 'hospitality' emphasizes important issues for us as we learn to build our future together with people who are refugees, migrant and asylum seekers who are now desiring to call Australia home and put down roots.

It can be said for us this morning that this 'table talk - table manners' from Jesus is a metaphor for us as we seek to live together - to build a future together - with these strangers at our doors. There are lessons for us on behaviour and attitudes as we form relationships and build community with those seeking to restart their lives in Australia.

There is no doubt that the coming together of different cultures creates conflict. We are aware of this daily as we listen to the radio, watch the television news and read our newspapers. We worry about what is happening to our country, our state, our neighbourhood and our street. What can we do? What are we doing as Christians - individuals and collectively as the Church - to try and live together - build a future together in this place we all want to call home.

We must ask ourselves with regard to refugees and migrants "Are we creating situations where we are not being true to this gospel? especially the parables of Luke. Are we, as Christians, as the Church, and the local congregation, living out these parables in our actions today?

Are we in a position 'at the table' where the host may come and ask us to shift? In other words, if we are seeking to live out the Gospel of Jesus the Christ, would it be that, if he were present amongst us, he would come and ask us to shift in order for the outcast, the marginalised to come and take our seats.

As an individual, Church or congregation, where have we placed ourselves at the table in our society and communities?

As hosts, are we giving without any expectations of repayment ('brownie points')? Where have we placed ourselves in connection with 'living with the other'? Are we being hospitable? Are we offering open hands of welcome, smiles of trust? Or are we helping to fuel the problems by not listening and not realising our duty as followers of Jesus the Christ? Do we help fuel the problem by being silent and not protecting the rights of others who are strangers and foreigners in our land? Are we drifting in a sea of conformity or apathy by not caring to choose between right and wrong?

Jesus' warnings in these parables point to one of the main causes of injustice: we all share the guilt when we decide who it is we want to be associated with; and so everyone tries to climb higher, leaving the weakest in the most isolated and helpless position. The parables teach us to include the poor in our circle of relationships; to be a friend of the poor; to share life with 'seeming outcasts'. We are challenged to identify with the poor and the loss of privileges and social standing. Can we handle that! The challenge of discipleship for us today in building a future together is not so much about our willingness to give up our first world prosperity so as to give and share with the poor. Instead, the question is whether we are ready to give up the status, power and privileges and take our place at the lowest seats at the table. Such action has the potential to transform our society.

People will see the gospel embodied in the lives of Jesus' followers, who genuinely want to share the love of Christ by identifying with those hurting and those in humble circumstances. What is our response this Refugee and Migrant Sunday 2004?