

PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE MONTH OF JULY 2016

*“I will give you a new heart... I will give you a heart of flesh...
a new spirit I will put within you”*

REFLECTION ONE

“I will give you a new heart . . .”

At the time of writing, Australians are on the eve of the Federal Election. It has been a long campaign – which has been regularly described as “boring.” Given the violence and unrest that at times attends election periods in other areas of the globe – ‘boring’ is manageable!



At the same time, we are celebrating the first anniversary of Pope Francis’ ground-breaking Encyclical “Laudato Si.’ He reminds us:

“It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face”ⁱ

This encyclical, with its strong focus on the notion that ‘everything is connected’ assures us that creation is a gift for the benefit of all. Further, it reinforces the notion that the work of social transformation is essential to the Christian life. “It stems from God’s own passion for the marginalised and suffering. And it involves every aspect of our lives.”ⁱⁱ Pope Francis notes:

*Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined
to a sincere love for our fellow human beings
and an unwavering commitment
to resolving the problems of society.”ⁱⁱⁱ*

We all yearn for values of justice and human decency to be intrinsic to our way of life, not just in our time, but as the legacy for generations still to come. We want our respective nations to cultivate in its citizens a collective “new heart” so that we might respond to the inherent dignity of each person.

Mark Peel, a Melbourne social researcher puts it this way:

The people in the present to whom we now need to listen are those who have already lost the most... who have paid a price – in blasted hopes and dreams - for the comforts of others. We need to listen, not out of sympathy or compassion but because they have much to tell us. ‘Losers’ know things about the world that winners don’t. There are things that being privileged doesn’t teach you. From the lowest rung, you see things that aren’t visible from the top or centre.^{iv}



PRAYER SUGGESTION: In reflecting on the following passage, the symbols below may be useful.



“A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” [Ezek. 36:34]

- **Seeds** – the seeds of compassion in every human being.
- **Bowl** – our openness to Christ and one another.
- **Stones** – the challenge of mercy, that get in the way of our responding to the suffering and need of others
- **Cross** – we follow in Christ’s footsteps by extending our love and practical support to those in our society, who ‘have much to tell us.’

REFLECTION TWO

“I will give you a heart of flesh . . .”

In 2013 Pope Francis spoke to Non-Resident Ambassadors to the Holy See. He had this to say:



“...we must also acknowledge that the majority of the men and women of our time continue to live daily in situations of insecurity, with dire consequences. Certain pathologies are increasing, with their psychological consequences; fear and desperation grip the hearts of many people, even in the so-called rich countries; the joy of life is diminishing; indecency and violence are on the rise; poverty is becoming more and more evident. People have to struggle to live and, frequently, to live in an undignified way...”^v

Recent events around the world have brought home to us the significance of Pope Francis’ reflection. We have witnessed the aftermath of the devastating and tragic shootings in Orlando, Florida; the murder of the British MP; and here in Oceania, outbreaks of civil unrest in Papua New Guinea. In addition, there have been increasing reports of violence in the now illegal detention centre on Manus Island, as well as continued incidents of self-harm, abuse and mental illness on Nauru. In the latter instances, the government has gone so far as *“imposing a canopy of silence over the treatment of people who seek protection”^{vi}*

These events appear to be the result of anger, frustration, desperation misguided policies, and a diminishing sense of the “joy of life.” In each instance a mirror is held up to our respective societies. What can we learn about ourselves and the systems which govern us?

The eminent Papua New Guinean writer, jurist, politician and philosopher Bernard Narokobi, writing to and about his Melanesian people, correctly, and somewhat prophetically, asks some pertinent questions of all of us:

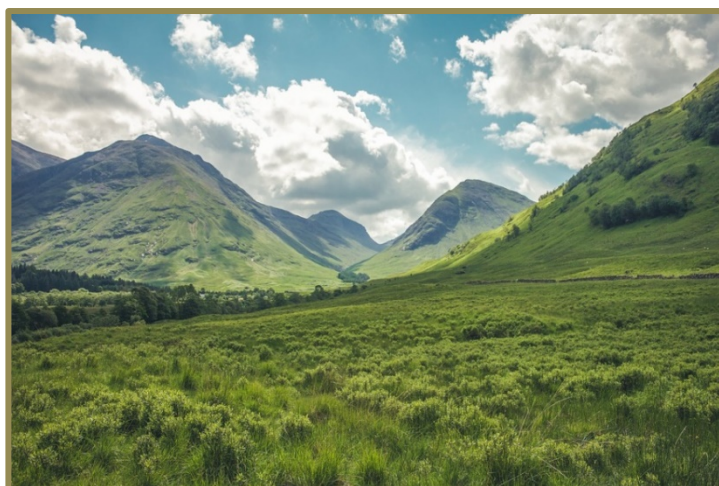
*Now that we are finally connected
with the world, we suddenly see ourselves through the world mirror.
Will we see our own true size images, or will we see ourselves in the
images and the shadows of others?
Will we see ourselves in the long shadows of the dwindling light and
the advanced darkness of the evening dusk, or will we see ourselves in
the long and radiant rays of the rising sun? We can choose, if we will.^{vii}*

We are so very aware that the wound of any part of creation is a wound to each member. As we come so often face to face with the ‘heart of stone’ in our communities, may we soften our hearts with these thoughts:

*Even when we sail through stormy seas
And fly amidst rain clouds,
We know you await us,
With kaikai and coconut.*

*You who turn storms into gentle winds,
And troubled seas into tranquil waters,
You who make yams grow
And bananas blossom,*

*Wash our people with justice,
Teach us with righteousness,
Speak to us daily,
Straighten us to serve you.^{viii}*



REFLECTION THREE

“... a new spirit I will put within you”

As the year unfolds, we find ourselves rhythmically working and praying for a more just world that a ‘new spirit’ of love and justice will break through. Each of us and collectively all of us, mindful of the place of the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy in our tradition, will find a ‘focus’ in prayer/action in any or some of these issues – and many more.

- Climate Change and Sustainable Development
- Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- First Australians: Justice for All
- Human Trafficking
- Coal Seam Gas
- Ageing and Disability
- Educating for Life
- Affordable Health Care
- Housing and Homelessness
- Young People with Diminishing Hope
- Timor Sea Border Justice
- West Papua



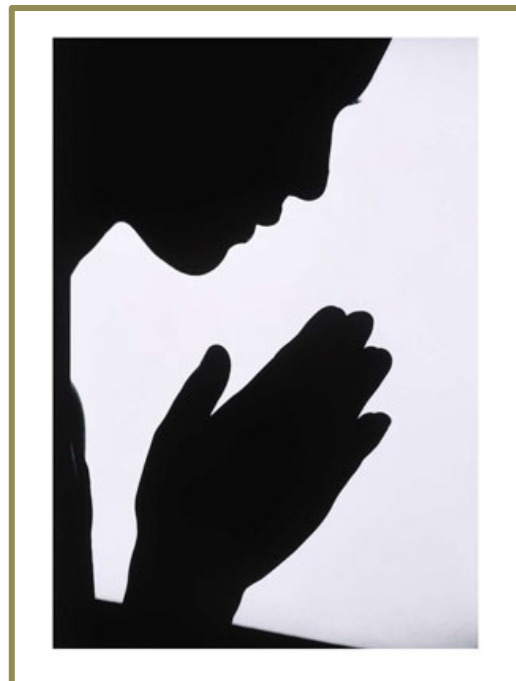
The following **Prayer from Zimbabwe**^{ix} may find an echo in us:

*We have been given eyes to see and ears to listen.
We have been given tongues...to speak for the innocent ...and the guilty,
to praise, encourage and support,
to proclaim in season and out, the news that is good news.*

*We have been given hands to reach out and strengthen the fearful,
to protect the weak and lift up the fallen,
to embrace the dying,
to share burdens and wipe away tears...
To build up, not to tear down,
to fan the embers, not to quench the smouldering wick,
to bless not to strike,
to give not to withhold.*

*We have been given minds to judge...ourselves, not others,
situations, not motives;
To seek solutions, not excuses, justice, not expediency.
To discern the essential from the merely desirable,
the good from the less good and the less good from the bad...
We have been given hearts to feel,
to interpret the hidden meanings beneath the words spoken,
to open doors closed by despair.
To discover the best in others and set it free,
to understand and to forgive...or to simply forgive...
to comfort the sorrowful, to love and thereby heal the scars.*

*We have been given all these things so that people around us
may neither doubt nor forget God's presence among them;
That in our words and in our actions,
God may speak and act and others, in turn, may sense the presence of God
when we pass by, and seeing us, know with little effort
that they can catch a glimpse of God.*



As Catherine reminds us: “...*Of all other gifts, prayer must come from God: hence, we must beg it continually, with a profound humility and untiring patience.*” x

ⁱ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* [15]

ⁱⁱ NetAct Voting For Our Values: A Fair Deal for All. A Project of Catholic Social Justice Welfare and Educational Agencies. Jan.Barnett@sosj.org.au

ⁱⁱⁱ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* [91]

^{iv} Mark Peel *The Forgotten Lessons of the Past: Housing Security and Justice.* cited in: NetAct Voting For Our Values: A Fair Deal for All. A Project of Catholic Social Justice Welfare and Educational Agencies. Jan.Barnett@sosj.org.au

^v Pope Francis: Address to Non-Resident Ambassadors to the Holy See, 16 May 2013

^{vi} Andrew Hamilton, Eureka Street 8 June 2016. <http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=49502>

^{vii} Bernard Narokobi *The Melanesian Way*, Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (Borokoi ami the Institute of Pacific Studies (Suva). 1980 (revised 1983).p.5

^{viii} Bernard Narokobi *Psalm of the Pacific* (extract)

^{ix} Jean Harrison and Timothy Radcliffe, eds. *Just One Year: Prayer and Worship Through the Christian Year*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd/CAFOD, Christian Aid, 2006

^x Familiar Instructions, p. 52

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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