

Reflections on Synodality: Amos, A Prophet of God's Justice

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*“They hate the man who teaches justice at the city gate
and they detest anyone who speaks the truth.
Therefore, for trampling on the poor man
and for extorting levies on his wheat,
although you have built houses of dressed stone,
you will not live in them;
although you have planted pleasant vineyards,
you will not drink wine from them.
For I know how many your crimes are and how outrageous your sins,
you oppressors of the righteous
who take bribes and thrust aside the poor at the gates.
So anyone prudent keeps silent at this time for the time is evil.”*

(Amos 5:10-15)

Amos was a shepherd from Judea (around 760-745 B.C.) whom God called to “Prophesy to my people in Israel” (Amos 7:14-15), to speak on God’s behalf to the people of Israel. Amos criticised the People of God “for cheating, defrauding and oppressing the poor, and all the while hoping to cover this up by the sham of an elaborate liturgy”¹ He rejected their disconnection between life and religion. He preached that religion was a “way of life that involved the ethical behaviour of individual to individual”² and he demanded “justice and concern for the outcast and oppressed”³

Jesus, in his time, “found a people amongst whom poverty and injustice were rife, and the dignity of some of God’s children was being denied to them by the way they were being rejected and marginalised within their society. Even worse, in Jesus’ view, the Jewish authorities of his time interpreted [God’s] Law to suit their purposes and used the Law itself to justify the oppression and injustice”⁴ Jesus opposed these injustices whether practiced by the people or by the authorities. As a result, they plotted to kill him (John 11:56-57).

If Jesus were to return today he would find many similar inequalities, injustices and rejections in our society. The homeless, the addicted, the sick, the disabled,

¹ *Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1735.

² Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, New York, Paulist Press, 1984, p. 319.

³ Boadt, 316.

⁴ McVerry, *Jesus, Social Revolutionary?* Dublin, Veritas, 2008, p. 140.

the migrant are still being treated as second-class citizens, and are being marginalised. Across the world so many millions endure unending poverty, hunger, inadequate medical and educational services while so many in other countries enjoy gluttonous wealth and sinful waste. In recent months, for example, we have read of countries throwing away surplus Covid vaccines while other countries see their citizens die in their thousands without them.

Would Jesus accept a society “where travellers are forced to live on the roadside, where people sleep in doorways, where those with disabilities cannot get essential services, where children with special needs wait years for assessment and even longer for help”?⁵ Would he accept a society where those fleeing from persecution and, often, certain death and seeking refuge in our country must wait 10 years and more before their accepted into our society?

Working in a synodal way:

Pope Francis has said that synodality is about walking side by side with our brothers and sisters of the human family as Christ helps us understand the Scriptures and apply them to our lives. So, he is talking, not just about a way of walking with Christ during the synod, but about a way of following Christ, a way of life – during the synod and ALWAYS.

Amos calls the people of God to account; he demands action and insists on change. Like Amos, we must – as church members - raise our prophetic voices for those who are being treated unjustly (the homeless, addicted, children with special needs, refugees, women, etc.). We must “call out” the authorities (both Church and State) who perpetrate/perpetuate these injustices, we must “demand action” of the State and of the Church for turning a blind eye to the problems of the marginalised, and we must “insist on change” in our efforts to create a just or Christian society.⁶

So, what are the glaring injustices being perpetrated, either by commission or omission, in/by the Church? What can we do, through the Synodal Pathway to address these?

In our parish, who is suffering as a result of being treated unjustly? We must identify and be identified with these sufferers. We must be compassionate towards them, that is, we must understand their suffering and ‘suffer in

⁵ McVerry, *Jesus: Social Revolutionary*, 142.

⁶ Pope Francis’ Address in Rio de Janeiro, 2013.

solidarity with them' (that's what 'compassionate' means). Because, it is only then that we will really understand their situation, know what needs changing, and set about changing it.

Should we, for example, establish 'Faith and Justice' Groups at parish level to promote awareness of the connection between faith and justice? Should we, at parish level, set up Action Groups to address injustices in the church and in our local community? How else do we, as church, address the glaring injustices in our treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, of Travellers, of people with disabilities.....? Are there properties in our parish that could be adapted as 'accommodation hubs' for those fleeing the Ukraine atrocities?

As followers of Christ we are tasked with building together "a community where everyone's needs are met through the caring and sharing of each person in the community, where everyone feels loved, valued and respected."⁷ That would surely be the Kingdom of God on earth. That loving, caring, valuing and respecting must also be the means of achieving the objective for us as individual Christians and for our Church.

Jesus came on earth to make God's vision for our world a reality. We Christians are called "to transform this world through our radical solidarity with all others, to follow him who gave his life for us by giving our own lives, and everything we have and are, for our brothers and sisters – a radical personal conversion that would revolutionise our world."⁸

Where do I start? Faith without justice is hypocrisy.

⁷ McVerry, 94-95.

⁸ McVerry, 142.