

MASS FOR 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF CARJ

7 NOVEMBER 09 WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL.

Today's Gospel, and indeed the example of St Martin of Porres to whom we look for inspiration, centres on the Christian call to love. 'You must love,' says Jesus. 'You must love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself.' These are words to renew in us the commitment we give to the work of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice, as we thank God for its work over the last 25 years and look forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

This profound commitment to love is also a foundation for the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI. In his first encyclical he meditated on the presence of love in our lives. The title of the encyclical was 'God is Love' and he has placed this conviction at the centre of everything he does.

His most recent encyclical is called 'Love in Truth' and, as you know, it is an exploration of the task facing mankind today. He opens his teaching document with these words:

'Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity.'

Pope Benedict goes on to say that the instinct for love and truth, the desire for them, never leaves the human heart, despite even the most horrendous of circumstances. This is so, he says, because love and truth 'are the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person.' For this reason, his teaching is profoundly optimistic, in contrast to much of the existential pessimism of the day.

This gives us a glimpse of the reason why we can remain hopeful in all that we do, despite difficulties and set-backs. This gives us the platform on which to do our work: the pursuit of 'integral human development', of the person and of society, in the economic, environmental, technological and global crises of today.

Indeed, when speaking of the fact of globalisation and the movement of people, the Pope says that 'we should not be its victims but rather its protagonists, acting in the light of reason, guided by charity and truth.' The processes of globalisation, he says, open up the 'humanising goal of solidarity' as long as this desire for genuine solidarity is not overwhelmed by considerations that are individualistic and utilitarian. The question he poses, which is so relevant to us today, is whether the globalisation which makes us now all neighbours is also making us brothers and sisters?

Today is a day for congratulating CARJ on its work and achievements in the task of making us genuinely brothers and sisters. The context and history of this work are well set out in the publications prepared for today. It is gratifying to read of the steady and structured progress made by the Association since its beginnings in 1986.

What is clear is that love and truth remain the key motivations and aims in all this work. Responding to particular needs, working for changes in legislation, growth in

political influence are parts of the picture but never the whole. The fundamental task is to speak the truth in love: the truth of who we are and how we are to live together.

I appreciate the clarity with which some of the changes facing us have been laid out. They are there, and are substantial, and I know they will be pursued with courage and dedication.

They are exemplified in points of my own reflection.

How often I hear of difficulties and injustices experienced at the borders of our countries. The latest regulations are intensely demanding and yet not at all consistently applied in the countries of origin. Detentions are unpredictable and so difficult to have properly reviewed. This causes anger and distress. It hampers the work of true harmony and well-being.

These painful and distressing events reflect a deeper concern: that the working out of the European Human Rights Act, the work of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the elaboration of the new Single Equalities Act are fraught with difficulties in finding the correct balance between the different rights of individuals and groups.

I say this because these matters touch directly on the rights of individuals of religious faith and on religious institutions to act with integrity and thereby make their full contribution to the wellbeing of society.

There is a view, it would seem, that seeks to confine the expression of truth to which religious faith is committed, to the private sphere while, at the same time, being willing to accept some of the good work which arises from that faith and truth.

But truth and love, in the end, are inseparable. A love which does not act in truth is patronising and deceptive. A truth which is not spoken in love is experienced as a harsh judgement and will only be rebuffed. Work for human solidarity, a true expression of love, needs to be founded on a true understanding of our human nature and of its ethical demands.

Pope Benedict's teaching is clear: truth and love are the vocation of the human person. This is the origin of our hope. But unless this is recognised in every activity then true progress, real development, far-reaching justice will not be achieved. We will be left, rather, with a shallow and fragile truce, a meagre and reluctant tolerance of one another. That is not enough.

The human person has an innate and inviolable dignity, from the first moment of life to its natural ending. This dignity is from God. It is not bestowed by any state or statute and cannot be removed by them

The human person is a spiritual being, capable of real love and of knowledge of God. The recognition and development of this capacity is central to every process of true education.

The human person is not simply an autonomous individual, but each of us is made for community and finds our fulfilment in giving of our best to each other in solidarity. The recognition of this truth is the only basis for the work of true social cohesion.

The truth in which we rejoice today is that we belong to each other because we first belong to God.

It is so right, then, that we celebrate this 25th anniversary of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice here at the altar, in this Mass. In the sacrifice of Christ we see truth and love at their fullest expression. Here is the truth of the love of God for every person. Here is the love of the truth which carried Jesus to his death. Here is the truth of the love with which we, in our turn, seek to respond to the love of God in our worship of our loving Father and in service one to another. Here is the love of the truth which we are called to speak to one another and to our world today.

May the Lord bless our work this day, for it is His. May He guide our minds and hearts, for we wish only to do His will. And, in His good time, may our work come to its fulfilment.

+Vincent Nichols