

Exploring the Beatitudes – 6

*Blessed are those
who hunger and
thirst for
justice...
for they shall have*

Those who campaign for justice often find themselves 'out of step' with the rest of the world.

Former Zealandia editor, Dennis Horton, describes how a burning desire to seek justice is a sure sign of the inner presence of a passionate God

By anyone's reckoning, it was a novel way to spend a Sunday afternoon. About four hundred of us walked, four abreast, in silence along Auckland's Tamaki Drive, challenging the APEC conference to be hosted in our city a week later.

The march was as much liturgy as protest. A call to prayer, remembering the victims of economic injustice everywhere, had set the scene as we assembled in the convent grounds at Kohimarama; and with the exception of a few green-ies, eagerly pushing their own barrow, most of us managed to keep that spirit of inner quiet as we went.

The walk had been organised by the Catholic religious of Auckland, and some of them were identified by the banners they bore. Sisters acted as marshals, acolytes for this procession through the secular city; some in jeans and sneakers, and all wearing the reflective vests that signal at once caution and safety. We were guided on our way by uniformed police. The *Herald* next day would describe them as stony-faced; but

they seemed to me more bemused than menacing; and I thanked God that, unlike dissenters at previous APEC venues, we could make our protest peacefully and count on the law to uphold our right to do so.

As we walked, I reflected on the symbolism of our march. As silent as the millions for whom the miracle of the free-market economy is not working, we walked against the flow of so many apparently content with their lot; youngsters on roller-blades; wind-surfers in wet suits folding their sails; joggers having to share their route with this slower moving mass; Sunday strollers and joy-riders, either mystified or miffed by this discordant note on one of the ritziest stretches of Auckland's affluent waterfront.

Perhaps it is the fate of all who hunger and thirst for justice to somehow feel sidelined, out of step with the rest of the world, or at least with those for whom the system seems to be working. Yet the promise of the

gospel is that whoever hungers shall be satisfied.

Our faith in the validity of the beatitudes is underpinned by two overwhelming convictions. One is the sheer power of the truth. There is a flame, born of the desire for freedom, that burns in every human heart; and the witness of history is that no form of oppression will succeed in stifling that flame for ever. The collapse, in our own time, of Soviet communism at one end of the political spectrum, and of the empires of Marcos and Pinochet at the other, is proof that unjust structures eventually come unstuck. The banners on our march that spoke most eloquently were those calling for freedom in East Timor; that call was to echo through the week ahead, with an insistence that even APEC's leaders could not ignore.

The free market itself may yet self-destruct, from its own rapacity and greed. Jenny Shipley can't fault the logic of public servants whose junkets abroad are taken at tax-payers' expense

or who pay themselves in one year what most of us could not earn in a decade or more; they are simply following the principles of a market-driven economy that rewards self-interest and eschews any thought for the common good or for an equitable distribution of wealth which in God's plan is meant for all.

With a hunger and thirst for justice goes the commitment to see that the world's wealth is shared by all who bear the Creator's image. In gospel terms, an economy that allows an ever-widening gap between rich and poor is essentially bankrupt, as is any government which lets market forces rule to such an extent that the powerful prosper at poor people's expense.

The other overwhelming conviction which springs from the beatitudes is that the God whom Jesus reveals is a passionate God who not only hears the cry of the poor, but who bears their pain and shares their struggle until the kingdom comes. For my birthday this year, my wife found a

1992 reprint of South African Dominican Albert Nolan's book, *Jesus Before Christianity*. Though a rereading brings not quite the revelation it offered when I discovered the book in the '70s, I was struck anew by Fr Nolan's insistence that God is not supremely indifferent and detached from human suffering, but is irrevocably committed to the liberation of humankind; and that if this is not a true picture of God, "then Jesus is not divine".

To believe in the God whom Jesus reveals is to trust that goodness can triumph over evil, that there is a power that can overthrow the systems of oppression and injustice, that there is a force stronger than the profit motive. It is the same drive that motivated Jesus; it is compassion and love, and it comes from the heart of God. As one millennium ends and another dawns, the future of our world rests hugely with those who can keep their faith in such love alive. ■



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Mini-Sabbatical

Welcome the Year of Jubilee

9TH MARCH – 17TH APRIL 2000

Needing time to slow down, to renew your vision? Is it time for a change of place and a change of pace?

In Mark 6:30, Jesus says:

"Come away to some quiet place all by yourselves and rest for awhile".

An opportunity for a loosely structured program offering a six-day Retreat, workshop on Christ – the Year of Jubilee and a Seminar on the *Enneagram*. Time to pray, relax, read and see some of the scenic beauty of Brisbane and environs.

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