

Address at Pike River Commemoration

Bishop P J Cullinane

22 November 2011

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19 November 2011
Cullinane

+ P J

Ladies and Gentlemen – kia ora koutou katoa.

First and foremost we think of the miners and their families. If Pike River is also an industrial issue, before that it is a human tragedy. Those who died were husbands and fathers, sons and brothers, workmates and colleagues. We share the grief of those most closely affected by their deaths.

But we share their grief NOT in desperation and with the sense of hopelessness that would be ours if there were no more to life than what they had had already. We need more than just memories. We need to know that they live. We need to know that if their family's love for them was great, God's love was and is greater still.

But it is also a time to ask what lessons might be learned. It is not for me to make judgements that will be better made by the Royal Commission and the Courts. Nevertheless, the kind of analysis that *is* appropriate for all of us to do looks to why people's lives do matter, and matter so much. This leads to a more fundamental problem which is this: if human life and dignity are not sacred at *every* point on the spectrum between conception and natural death, then ultimately they are not sacred *at any* point on that spectrum. Human life cannot be sacred at one moment and not the next.

As a nation, we need to be people who have a "consistent ethic" of respecting human life, human dignity and human rights right across the board of social and economic life, including employment, commerce and industry, housing, welfare and health.

There are some things that the market system left to itself simply cannot do. Its hard-nosed exploitation of resources, its hard-nosed drive to unending consumerism, and its track record of not always putting people before profits, is the reason why the proper role of governments is to put into place, the appropriate protections, checks and balances, safety standards etc. Talk of "self-regulation" is often no more than blatant self-interest; indeed, conflict of interest. Let us be wary of slogans about keeping government out of business. "Less government more freedom" means more freedom for the systems that continue to produce a very uneven playing field, and a still widening gap between the weak and the strong.

It is not for nothing that ordinary people have been protesting around the world against corporate greed, and irresponsible financial practices.

It is not surprising that Pope Benedict's Commission for Justice and Peace has recently called for greater regulation of world markets, financial practices, and fairer taxation.

I am putting it to you, ladies and gentlemen, that we might well honour those who died at Pike River by being people who insist on a "consistent ethic", or respecting human life, human dignity and human rights across the whole spectrum of human life.

Almighty and loving God, we ask you to give everlasting joy to those who died, and to those who mourn we ask you give them your gift of peace, and the profound hope that comes to us from the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.