

# Homily 5th Sunday Ordinary Time Waitangi Day 2011

Bishop Peter J Cullinane DD

**6 February 2011**

Homily – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time – Waitangi Day 2011

+ P J Cullinane

As on any Sunday, we gather first and foremost to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. That's what changes everything. That's what changes our lives and gives them purpose, hope and joy. Today is also our national day, Waitangi Day; that gives us an opportunity to pray for our nation, and reflect a little on what this should mean to us.

The first reading exemplifies that recurring theme of the Old Testament prophets: their concern for the lowly, the hungry, the homeless, exiles, orphans... That is what Catholic social teaching is about, but in the context of our world and our times.

The Church doesn't claim to have any blueprint, or even mandate, for social and economic planning. Its task is much more radical: to reach out to the minds and hearts of those who do the social and economic planning, sharing with them the vision of the gospel. Pope Paul VI taught that "for the Church, evangelizing means bringing the good news of Christ's Gospel into all the strata of society and all of human life, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new". In other words, taking the Gospel seriously means expecting it to make a difference in every area of life, including our social and economic planning; starting however, with the difference it makes to ourselves. In that same letter, Pope Paul VI taught that "there can be no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons".

For many years, Catholic social teaching has emphasised that the economic order is only *one aspect* of authentic human development. It needs to fit in with all the other requirements of genuine human development, for example, leaving spaces and opportunities for prayer, family life, reflection, recreation... That's why social and economic planning are not ethically neutral; they are part of the wider agenda of "making human life more human". That objective must be built into the processes of social and economic life, which is different from giving market forces free reign and then trying to redress the imbalances afterwards.

In his Encyclical *On Integral Human Development*, Pope Benedict spoke of the need to build into economic planning room for gratuitousness, compassion, giving and forgiving. That's a bit different from the way some people think of economic planning; it's different from putting a price on everything.

According to Catholic social teaching, it is no longer possible to pursue justice, nationally or internationally, without factoring in the needs of the world's poor. They must be included as of right, not merely as the recipients of "charity"; they are entitled to be participants in the economies of a world that belongs to everyone.

People's social and economic development go hand in hand. As recently as last week, Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma pleaded with international business people to help restore democracy in her country. She rightly expects that economic life and social life do have some responsibility for each other. And she rightly expects that what is happening to the people of one nation is the concern of people of other nations as well.

One day, those who focus narrowly on their economic interests and isolate them from other aspects of human development will be remembered, I suggest, somewhat as we now

remember the gladiators of the Roman Empire: dangerous then, irrelevant now. Increasingly, people are seeing economic life as *one aspect* of human development.

It goes without saying that economic planning must aim to be successful, using the best business practices. The point being made is that it is only one requirement of authentic human development, and must not be allowed to inhibit the other requirements of human development.

One day, people of this nation will look back with gratitude for the work of the Waitangi Tribunal – if politicians allow it to do its work properly. Its work results directly from the fact that the Treaty itself was so grossly dishonoured and breached. Claims that the Treaty was not true and binding law anyway are irrelevant, because the seventh commandment is law and is binding. It tells us we may not confiscate what belongs to others, and if we have, then we have to find ways of giving back. The rest is history, the kind the Tribunal deals with in uncovering the facts, and recommending ways of making restitution.

But here, too, more is involved than just material transactions. The challenge is to appreciate what is called *mana whenua*, i.e. we need to learn about people's historical connections with the land, and why it means so much to them.

It's interesting today that scientists are now emphasising what indigenous peoples have always believed: that the wellbeing of the planet and human wellbeing are intimately related.

This, too, is Catholic social teaching. Pope Benedict teaches that it is impossible to separate protection of the environment from protection of human life because the book of nature is one and indivisible.

A few years earlier, Pope John Paul II and the Patriarch of Constantinople taught that “these problems are not merely economic and technical, they are moral and spiritual. Solutions can be found at the economic level only if we undergo a radical change of heart, leading to changes of lifestyle, and sustainable patterns of consumption and production.” Indigenous peoples of the world would have known exactly what he meant.

The German missionary Riemenschneider who lived and worked among the Maori of Taranaki in the mid nineteenth century only a decade or so after the signing of the Treaty, suffered with them their experience of losing what was theirs, their increasing unrest and distress at the loss of their lands. He didn't understand the Maori concept of land, but he could report on it as they explained it to him. He reports them as saying that “Our land is our greatest good. It is to us like our mother's breast”. That can't be reduced to the price of milk.

So this Waitangi day, let us allow ourselves to be too easily distracted by the politics and posturing, the antics and the scapegoating. In the spirit of the Church's social teaching let us recommit ourselves to helping people to understand each others' different perspectives. Let's take seriously the Church's teaching that the Gospel is intended to make a difference to every aspect of human life.