

## Set your hearts on his kingdom first

The images which have swept like a tidal surge into our living rooms this week of starving refugees in Damascus, of warring factions in Ukraine and of dying new born babies in South Sudan, sit somewhat mysteriously aside the words of Jesus in the gospel which we read at Mass this weekend: do not worry about what you are to eat, nor about your body and how to clothe it. The looks of worry on the faces of the people who are suffering from a deep uncertainty and a desperate helplessness in those countries make us ask of such words how are we to find sense in them?

Of course the first thing to understand is that Jesus is not being flippant. He knew that life was hard and that it was more than probable that for the majority of people the idea of material riches was just a pipedream. He understood well enough that what came out top on most people's list of priorities was food on the table and clothes on your back. But in asking people to consider those priorities, Jesus also asked them if God had any place amongst them, and if so, how far up the list did God come? Is it a question which we make room for when compiling our list of priorities? Do we as children of the affluent society appreciate the impact that our choices make on others who are not as affluent as we are? Do we even consider God in the deliberations we make about our lives? As Christians it is vital that we should since what informs our choices matters because of the impact they have in influencing just how our lives will unfold. If we really open our minds to take on board what Jesus says about the sort of values we place at the centre of our lives, we see just how important his words become and just how relevant they remain, so much so that they still speak powerfully to a world that is seemingly so indifferent to his message.

Set your hearts on his kingdom first, he says, and to so many in our modern society that sounds as if Jesus is advocating a distancing from the reality of peoples' lives, that somehow these words are directing people towards something unachievable, a million miles away from life as it is. Yet it's only when you come to realise that the kingdom of which Jesus is speaking is slap bang in the middle of those lives, that it hits you. The poor in spirit, the gentle, those who mourn and who hunger for what is right, the merciful and the pure in heart, the peacemakers and the persecuted, these are the ones to whom the kingdom belongs, and it is in the values which they espouse, that the righteousness of which Jesus speaks makes its stance against the issues of hunger, infant mortality, war, and so, on that so frequently blight our communities.

On Wednesday Lent begins, and once again we will receive the ash on our foreheads as a reminder of what we are made. It is a solemn moment when we take on board what our values are and ask ourselves whether we are living them out in our daily lives, or simply paying lip service to them. Lent is a time to look at that list of priorities and see where and how God features on it. The season of Lent calls on us to open ourselves up to a real change of heart and it directs our thoughts and deeds to the priorities and values of the gospel. It challenges us through fasting and almsgiving to tasks of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and through prayer to setting our hearts on the kingdom and its priorities.