

Responsibility and Action.

What is the relationship between responsibility and action and how is it to be applied to faith in general and to my faith in particular? We hear a lot these days about individual rights and of how it seems that everyone can claim a right to something at some stage, and of how if that right is denied, violated or abused, then woe be tide the person who caused the breach. Of course rights are important, so much so that the United Nations has a whole convention on the subject, with a High Commissioner tasked with the job of ensuring global compliance to the basic rights of every individual on the planet. It is a great and noble cause and it is one which the Catholic Church was instrumental in drawing up. But along with rights come responsibilities and sitting alongside responsibility come actions.

From its very outset, the Church has always held to the concept of the “common good” as being essential to its teaching. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told *the faithful all lived together and owned everything in common, they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds amongst themselves according to what each one needed*. Now whilst such an ideal still remains at the heart of its teaching even if the literal application of it as portrayed in Acts no longer pertains to how we live, its essence still evokes the vocation in each of us to be generous and altruistic with our own possessions, both material and spiritual, which brings me to the question I posed at the beginning. How am I to live out my vocation responsibly and actively, respecting as I do the right of others to demur? The gospel today gives us three important paragraphs each one of which offers an insight into the subject of social morality, social cohesion and social justice, and our duty to act thereon.

If your brother does something wrong... What generates a moral imperative has to be an accepted norm for it to work, and if we witness actions or words which disregard and abuse these norms, then as responsible Christians we should make our views known and felt. We should not simply allow such abuses to go unopposed or unquestioned. The great moral debates which challenge and confront our society today of euthanasia, assisted dying and abortion are ones which require the Catholic view to be articulated clearly and robustly since failure to do so will render society morally the poorer for such failure. *Whatever you bind on earth...* Unless a society knows how to apply limits on its desires and sees what is good and valuable in what it has created, and knows when to draw a line, its cohesion or its structure will begin to collapse. If we just allow our own rights to become inviolable and unchallengeable, then the basic norms of our society will begin to disintegrate. *For where two or three are gathered...* How we recognise the call to justice and how we implement it requires a great commitment both on behalf of our Christian communities and more immediately upon us as individuals. Again to return to the early Church, Acts tells us that the baptised *remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, the breaking of bread and to prayer*. Here are we today, gathered in this place and can we claim still to be faithful to those words? Perhaps the best way for us to understand this call to responsibility and action, to morality, cohesion and justice, is to place before our thoughts the great parable of Jesus of the Last Judgement and to recall his words which we will read later this year on the feast of Christ the King... *I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me...* Here is responsibility and action defining a society which is clear about its morals, sure of its cohesion and actively applying its justice. Is it however one which we recognise around us today?