



Fr Kevin Bates SM

REFLECTION ARE SOME LIVES WORTH MORE THAN OTHERS?

This week we've seen endless hours of footage of the devastation caused in Florida by Hurricane Irma. As of now some six million people in Florida are without power, several people have died, and as was the case recently in Texas, people have been heroic in their efforts to care for each other. Our networks had their own reporters on the ground.

We also got some pictures and reports of the damage done earlier across the Caribbean. One Island in particular, Barbuda, had nearly every building demolished. Details however were less forthcoming. We had no reporters there.

Meanwhile the disaster in Myanmar continues apace with thousands upon thousands of Rohingya Muslim people fleeing to Bangladesh. Media were not permitted into the area concerned so our coverage necessarily was far more sketchy.

Bangladesh itself had about half its population submerged under floodwaters with the ensuing threat of disease and death of great concern. Once again our own media coverage was minimal or non-existent. There were plenty of reports to be found if one took the time to search on some of the international news providers.

It's easy to become moralistic about which bits of tragedy the media chooses to share with us. Some people have been asking whether we think that lives in the US for instance, have more value than those in Myanmar or Bangladesh.

We can easily enough transpose the same questions to our local scene. The percentage of Aboriginal inmates in our prisons for example leads many to conclude that our legal system works well enough for non-indigenous people and in some respects spells doom for people who do

not, will not and cannot fit in with this system. The old cliché that declares that if we are not part of the solution then we are part of the problem comes to mind. While we stay silent, collude or even participate in systems that in some respects are unjust, then we have questions to answer.

Are some lives in our view of more value than others? If we were each asked that question we'd probably say that we regard each life as being of equal value. Yet we are, each one of us, part of a society in which some lives are valued more than others.

This question also becomes part of the conversations around the euthanasia or "assisted dying" legislation that will shortly come before the New South Wales Parliament. When someone has reached his or her use-by date, isn't it time for us to help them on their way?

Underlying all these dilemmas, we have a deep shared memory that each person is made in the image of God. In which case each person has rights, freedoms and dignity that is unique to each one and can never be really compared to those of another person.

It is at this point that we could do well to pause, catch our breath and re-consider our views on some of the above matters. Rather than becoming moralistic and judgemental, we could take a gentler, but no less clear approach by having as our starting point the unique dignity of every single person who is an image, a sacrament of God's presence in our world.

In the suffering brought about by natural disasters, in the debilitation occasioned by illness and ageing, in the anonymity that reduces individuals to being a number among millions of others, there is hidden, someone of unique value. Here is someone who longs to be loved and to love. Here is someone capable of showing the face of the suffering Christ, the compassionate Christ, the healing Christ if only he or she is given the opportunity.

We pray for our suffering world. We pray too for ourselves that we become agents of liberation and hope, especially when precious lives seem to be forgotten.

Father Kevin

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