

REFLECTION: GIFT OR POSSESSION?

In a world where ownership plays such a prominent role in the life of nations, families, institutions and individuals, it's worth stepping back now and then and listening for what this need to own things is telling us about ourselves.

In this world, ownership is protected by law, and some legal entities are entirely devoted to dealing with property and the rights and obligations that property entails.

Churches over the ages have been split-up because of arguments over property matters. Governments, including our own spend an increasing amount of energy on protecting what they see as "ours". Our newly formed Border Protection and Immigration structure is an expression of this preoccupation.

Our laws around property and ownership are by and large designed to protect us from each other, and from others beyond the boundaries we have created for ourselves.

There are societies, some of them quite ancient and wise, who sing a different tune. Ownership is something that means little to them. Life and all that comes with the gift of life is seen precisely as that, a gift, moreover a gift that is at its best when it is shared.

The laws in these societies are designed to preserve the gift for all who care to share in it. The values embodied in these laws are not about borders that need protecting, but rather they are about gifts that deserve celebrating.

Because as a Church, we cannot be spectators in our own culture, of necessity we have become caught up in the world of property, security and border protection. This border protection comes in many guises and we are masters of most of them. We play the game regarding property as our society at large expects us to do.

The jury is surely out on the question as to whether this system provides real peace, dignity and a haven for all who need somewhere to call home. Our system is pretty much built on fear, fear of losing what we have and fear of not having as much as others have.

The economy and laws of the more ancient societies are built not on fear so much as thankfulness. One would have to think that the prevailing spirit of these societies is more at home with the Gospel of Jesus than our prevailing western culture, with its preoccupations with ownership and protection.

The self, whether it be the individual or communal self, is at the centre of the game in our society and this then shapes our law, our economy and many of our life choices.

For a Gospel that is built on love, thankfulness and welcome to break through in this setting, is an enormous task, for this Gospel is centred not on the self but rather on the Giver of the gifts with which we've been entrusted.

This task requires sacrifice, courage and sometimes heroism, as the Gospel flies in the face of the prevailing culture which treats life itself as a possession to be used and then disposed of according to the will of the imagined owner!

Unborn children, incapacitated elderly people, refugees, indigenous and other ethnic minorities, all fall victim to laws based on the premise that we own things, places and even people and therefore have the right to decide what to do with them.

The challenge for people of faith to be a light to the nations is profound. Even within our own hearts we find the causes of border protection, rights and privileges at work. Within our own Church we can find the same.

Daily prayer and a deep living communion with the Giver of all Life is our only real hope of breaking through these barriers we've built for ourselves and re-claiming our true centre. Only then will love replace fear and the peace that Jesus promised become possible.

Father Kevin