

Homily considerations

A Culture of Encounter: Be the Church

Throughout every year days and weeks are chosen to remind us of what is essential in life, giving the opportunity to focus together and grow in social charity and social friendship. Last week we celebrated Fathers' Day. Next month we will mark Labour Day with a welcome holiday. The week from Monday 13 September is Maori Language week in Aotearoa, and this Sunday 12 September, we begin Social Justice Week.

He Ahurea Tūtaki ki Ētahi atu: Me Noho Ko Koutou te Hāhi.

This week's emphasis is especially timely and welcome in the midst of pandemic struggles and consequences, especially for those who are most vulnerable: *A Culture of Encounter: Be the Church.*

In a necessary era of social distancing we are called to a new depth of connection not only with every local contact but with every person in our world, every sister and brother.

This connection is not the prevalent recreational reduction of intimacy to physical presence and connection sustained by social structures, but a new maturity of awareness that the person whom I have not yet met living in poverty ten thousand miles away is my sister, my brother, my mother and father.

The fact that many are physically distant is no obstacle for people of faith who understand that in Christ all race, class and border boundaries are transcended. Pope Francis encourages us to live appreciating that "isolation and withdrawal into one's own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter." (*Fratelli Tutti* 30 quoted in NZ Bishops' reflection at this link)

In today's gospel Jesus is not too concerned about what the crowds are up to and what they are saying. Jesus, who asks "Who do YOU say I am?"

There is no escaping His gaze and His scrutiny when Jesus asks me today: "How are you reaching out this hour in justice, in manaakitanga, in hospitality, and friendship to the one in need in your family, your street, your workplace, and your world?"

John O'Connor, Social Justice Week 2021