

EDITORIAL November 2017: Standing with the poor on Manus

Pope Francis has designated November 19 as World Day of the Poor. This focus echoes throughout Australia and the Pacific for there are few poorer in this region than those refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island, where essential services were switched off at the end of last month.

“Tragically, in our own time, even as ostentatious wealth accumulates in the hands of the privileged few, often in connection with illegal activities and the appalling exploitation of human dignity, there is a scandalous growth of poverty in broad sectors of society throughout our world,” the Pope says in his statement for World Day of the Poor.

The prisoners on Manus Island have been thrown on the mercy of a hostile host country – Human Rights Watch recently detailed an upsurge in violent attacks on refugees and asylum seekers by groups of armed locals. This cutting loose of those who originally sought asylum in Australia has earned the Australian government widespread opprobrium.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees representative says the new centre at Lorengau in Papua New Guinea is still undergoing major earthworks and is not ready for habitation. Nat Jit Lam told the *Guardian* he would not be taking any refugees there. His statement is backed by Amnesty International and Australian Greens senator Nick McKim.

Senator McKim says the new centre is also short of about 150 beds, “So even if all the guys came out today (November 1) there would be 150-plus of them who would be left on the side of the road in Lorengau, where there have been brutal attacks.”

From inside the detention centre, Aziz Adam told the Guardian the men had woken on Wednesday morning in fear of what might happen. “There is no water, power and food. Even the toilets do not work. People are stressful and anxious. Any time we expect the navy might come in.”

We are told the men have been protesting peacefully for the past three months. Australia has been criticized, most recently in a BBC [report](#) (October 31), which concludes Australia’s “hard line on immigration is unlikely to change”.

When Canberra introduced “Operation Sovereign Borders” in 2013, its reasoning was that its military

patrols which returned asylum seekers to Indonesia (though they are mostly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq), were restoring the integrity of its borders and helping to prevent deaths at sea. But critics say the policy is racially motivated.

What can we, as Australian citizens, do in the face of such a tough approach to people legitimately seeking asylum from persecution in Indonesia or elsewhere? Pope Francis calls in *Laudato Si’* for an approach to care for our common home that is integrated with care for the poor.

Many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centers of power ... are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world’s population LS #49.

Pope Francis speaks of a “numbness of conscience” and “tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality”.

How can we sharpen our consciences and get alongside the plight of refugees on Manus Island and in general? How can we find out more about why the asylum seekers are fleeing. Who can we talk to about this issue so as to start a conversation to build awareness of the issue?

Refugees and asylum seekers

More on Manus

The CEO of the Australian Social Justice Council, Frank Brennan SJ, names what is happening on Manus Island a “humanitarian disgrace” and calls on both the Australian government and the Labor opposition to bring the 600 men on Manus Island to Australia for processing.

[Read more](#)

See also [“We can stop the boats and also act decently, fairly and transparently”](#)

See also [“No end to the cruelty...”](#)

Refugee policy comes under more UN fire

The UN’s top expert on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has included criticism of the Australian Government in a scathing global report

condemning deterrence-based responses to people seeking asylum.

[Read more](#)

Martin Luther on today's refugee and migrant crises

According to the United Nations, more than 65 million people (23 million of them refugees) are counted as forcibly displaced due to persecution, war and violence. More than half are children under the age of 18. Now more than ever we need to revisit the views of this 16th-century reformer on hospitality.

[Read more](#)

Indigenous Australia

From Borroloola to the bush capital

Malarndirri McCarthy has had a whirlwind career. She began as a journalist, before entering politics in the Top End. Then she returned to her first love of story-telling, but now she's back as a politician but this time in the federal arena.

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Environment

Four Corners' investigation into Carmichael coal under the microscope

The argument against the Carmichael coal mine is strong. But the argument put forward by the ABC, not so much. Geoff Russell explains for *New Matilda*.

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Solar hydro power to Whyalla steel works

The clean energy company Zen Energy has approved a \$700m solar, battery and pumped hydro project at the South Australian town of Whyalla to power the OneSteel steelworks there.

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Work

The many failures of our wild welfare regime

Increasing the feelings of shame of being unemployed and restricting freedoms doesn't create more jobs and only grinds down a vulnerable group who are subsisting on a meagre payment. But the government is yet to show any meaningful concern over the significant risks of these draconian welfare policies, writes Amelia Paxman for *Eureka Street*.

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The Political Community

The Balfour declaration: Britain broke its feeble promise to the Palestinians

There is more than a little irony in Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to attend a "celebration" dinner this week in London with his British counterpart, Theresa May, marking the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

Palestinian objections to the 1917 document are well-known. Britain's Lord Balfour had no right to promise a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, on the land of another people, writes Jonathan Cook for the *Palestine Chronicle*.

[Read more](#)

Balfour another colonial distortion of history

The 100-year anniversary of one of Great Britain's great betrayals is upon us this month, writes Professor Stuart Rees for *New Matilda*.

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How Israel engages in "water apartheid"

"The level of unrestricted access to water enjoyed by those residing in Israel and Israeli settlers demonstrates that resources are plentiful, and that the lack of sufficient water for Palestinians is a direct result of Israel's discriminatory policies in water management," says a 2013 report *Water for one people only* quoted in Mersiha Gadzo's article for *Al Jazeera*.

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Use It

Nothing is impossible for God

Over two weeks in October, parish liturgy teams in the Melbourne archdiocese, attended Advent preparation sessions hosted by the Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation. The sessions included a two-part look at the Gospel of Mark and the Advent readings by renowned biblical scholar Rev. Prof. Francis Moloney SDB AO, as well as workshops on preparing the liturgical environment and music.

[Read and watch here](#)

A call for Australia to agree on a fair and just boundary with Timor-Leste

For more than a decade, Australia has treated Timor with disdain. We withdrew recognition of international maritime laws, used our disproportionate power as a wealthy nation, and even spied on previous negotiations using bugs

planted during an AusAid project. We bullied a fledgling nation - and a dear friend - out of resources that are rightfully theirs.

[Read more](#)

What is Catholic social teaching?

Learn about this rich tradition of thought and action for social justice. We offer a simple overview and suggest five ways to get to know the tradition better.

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Cecily McNeill

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