

24th Sunday (B)

13th September 2015

'Syrian crisis'

Is 50: *I offered my back to those who struck me*

Ps 114: *They surrounded me, the snares of death ...*

James 2: *I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds.*

Mk 8: 27–35: *'You are the Christ' ... He is destined to suffer, be rejected, killed ...*

I don't know about you, but I can't hear those words from St James, this evening, without thinking of the migrant / refugee crisis across Europe in these weeks. This is what St James had to say, 2000yrs ago: *"If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, 'I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty,' without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead."* (James 2:15–17).

The images of the past few weeks, including that of those washed up, dead or alive, on Greek beaches; the lines of migrants walking 5-abreast along busy Hungarian motorways; the crowded trains arriving in Munich and Frankfurt, heart-warmingly to the applause of local German people — these images are the reality of our day,

caused by the war and chaos particularly in Iraq and Syria. Let's remember though, that for every one refugee fleeing Syria and Iraq, by boat, train, or on foot, there are 100 more in the vast refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. The tens of thousands crossing into Europe are dwarfed by the millions being cared for within the borders of Syria's neighbours. The scale of the crisis is, of course, daunting, but we have to be open to our brothers and sisters in their necessities. Pope Francis has called on all the countries of Europe — especially through the network of the Church — to be open to caring for, and finding homes for, these refugees, our brothers and sisters in need. Every parish, and religious community, he said last Sunday at the *Angelus* address in St Peter's Square, is to be ready to welcome a migrant family. Here are his exact words, in:

God's mercy is seen through our works, as shown us by the life of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, whose anniversary of death we marked yesterday.

Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by vital hope, the Gospel calls us to be "neighbours" of the weakest and the abandoned. To give

them concrete hope. It's not enough to say, "Take heart. Be patient." Christian hope has a fighting spirit, with the tenacity of one who goes toward a sure goal.

Therefore, before the upcoming Jubilee of Mercy, I make an appeal to parishes, religious communities, monasteries and shrines of all Europe, that they give expression to an application of the Gospel and welcome a family of refugees. A concrete gesture in preparation for the Holy Year of Mercy.

That every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine of Europe welcome one family, beginning with my Diocese of Rome.

I address my brother bishops of Europe, true pastors, so that in their dioceses they back my appeal, remembering that Mercy is the second name of Love: "What you have done for the least of my brothers, that you have done for me."

The two parishes of the Vatican will also in the coming days welcome two families of refugees.

Already, across Europe, the various sections of *Caritas*, the Church's organizations for charity, have set to work in looking to implement the Pope's appeal, and work with the states that are receiving migrants at such a rate. Our diocese is not exception, and our diocesan *Caritas* has sent out an appeal for volunteers to work in a variety of

capacities. Here are some words from the *communiqué* issued by the head of our Westminster *Caritas*:

Your parish can join us in offering this support. When refugees arrive in the UK, they will not only need accommodation, but a range of other services to help them to adjust to life in the UK, and to recover from the traumas of the Syrian war. The Catholic community in the Diocese of Westminster has the generosity, skills and dedication to help contribute to the services that will be needed. These services will include, but are not limited to:

- Help with languages, including interpreting and ESOL (English as a Second Language teaching)
- Legal advice
- Medical services
- Befriending
- Basic necessities, such as clothing, shoes, toiletries, food parcels, toys etc.

I will work out, in the coming days, how best to coordinate this appeal for volunteers, though *Caritas* has provided us with a spreadsheet to communicate back to them soon those who are in a position to help, in whatever capacity. Let's be reminded, as we pray and reflect on our Catholic response to the migrant crisis, of St James's words: "*You say that you have faith, and I have good deeds; I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds — now you prove to me that you have faith without any good deeds to show!*" (James 2: 17–18).