



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

The Cleansing of the Temple

In the countdown before Easter, in-between blessed activities (ranging from processions to enactments) and getting the odd couple of days of trips and indulging, I find the narrative of the Cleansing of the Temple tempting!



Socially, economically and politically (nothing seems to exist outside of politics in this Country), the narrative of the *Cleansing of the Temple* becomes one of the boldest representations in the Gospel that show this revolutionary-pacifist Jesus Christ having a real go at the charlatans, frauds and double-dealers. Somehow this story strikes a chord;

Let me remind you:

12 And Jesus entered the temple[a] and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.

15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant.

16 and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

"Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies

you have prepared praise?"

17 And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Matthew 21:12-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

Probably the Christ saw the Temple 'of his Father' being defiled and it is at this point that he

loses it and in the process banishes 'the merchants and the money changers'. Now Jesus losing his temper was not a common occurrence, at least from what is written. It is very clear that something snapped turning him emotional and angry. I will obviously circumvent the theology in all of this story and will try to conceptualize this narrative within the current social context.

I don't know about you, but this is a story that sounds terribly familiar even 2,000 years down the line.

Jesus seems to speak to us loud and clear in this story almost predicting back then that this narrative would apply more than ever to our current context.

The way I understood this account is that Jesus is consistent about his teachings packaged around social justice. The 'cultural hegemony' of the time, that kept the poor and vulnerable toothless and helpless is what would surely piss him off nowadays as well. Because it seems that in our communities 'we' are solely measured by what we have, by what status we carry, by what social class we come from, by our roots - as if what matters is everything that is external to who we really are. But in a market-driven society I wouldn't expect it to be any different from that.

This story of Jesus speaks against the fact that so many people are at the risk of poverty. Much as the State and NGOs are working at it, having an estimated 80K with poverty hanging on their head is way too cumbersome to feel contented.

This story of Jesus speaks against the fact that domestic and gender driven violence is nowhere close to abating. It is really very difficult to believe that we will win this battle unless the police force and all other stakeholders really take our engagement to the next level.

Policy-makers, academics and researchers need to develop systems and services to respond to these challenges. Having over 1,000 people, mostly women reporting their case to the police is nothing short of tragic.

This story of Jesus speaks against the issue of child abuse which remains harrowing to put it mildly. More needs to be done. Professionals are trying hard but we need more resources plugged into this sector. In less than 3 years it was estimated that 1,000 cases of children were considered as suffering from some form of abuse (ToM, 2/3/17).

This story of Jesus speaks against what was reported a few years ago on The Malta Independent. It was reported that there are an estimated 30,000 people suffering from chronic depression (TMI, 27/8/14) that need our support. This mammoth amount of people does not include people who are going through other forms of mental health problems.

This story of Jesus speaks against another story that was reported on this same paper (TMI, 1/2/18). It was reported that 289 people committed suicide in these last 10 years in the large majority being men. 289 lost and lonely souls had given

up on life. This statistic does not include the much larger number of people who contemplate suicide. In these last ten years there were also 4 minors who committed suicide.

This story of Jesus speaks against the fact that mental health keeps being a major concern but our policy reactions come in hiccups.

This has to change. If we really want to see the changes happening in this country, we need to invest more in community services, build a new hospital, get as far away as possible from the Mt Carmel Hospital model of institutionalisation and bring in the high quality services we have seen developing for example in Oncology.

This story of Jesus speaks against the fact that even though an estimated 20% of our GDP was dedicated to an expenditure on social welfare in 2011 which translates itself into circa €1.2 billion people still fall by the wayside (ToM, 26/4/2013).

This story of Jesus speaks against benefit fraud and reckless social policy decisions that are governed by populist sympathies rather than proper and clear determined policies.

So, if there is anything that I can take from this story is that The Christ took decisive action, that is why Jesus probably thought it was OK to cause a fracas. The Cleansing of the Temple represents a struggle against the mistreatment of people, against all that corrupts the system, against the commodification of the human experience. Still so much work to do.

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