

“Our economy: just or unjust?”

Within our Catholic context discuss the ways the most vulnerable are able to find a place as individuals in society.

Approximately 3 million people are currently living in Poverty in Australia, what does this illustrate about our economy? How would you feel if you only got paid 99 cents an hour because of something you have no control over? After doing extensive research into this topic, my stance on this topic is that our economy is, in fact, unjust and discriminative towards many people in our society. This essay will discuss my personal experience, the problems faced by many Australians and what we need to do to ensure that our economy is beneficial for our society as a whole.

Having witnessed the unjust environment of our economy first hand, it is safe to say that our economy is mostly unjust. In 2014 my family and I migrated from the U.A.E to Brisbane, Queensland in hopes of finding: a place to call home, security, adequate housing and food, and a proper source of income. The last one was the most problematic as the housing and my uncle, who had been through this whole process before and is still, to this day, working hard to achieve a sustainable life for his family, had very generously supplied food. For this reason, my father went back to his job, as a civil engineer, overseas to supply the rest of us with money in Australia. At this point, the government was not helping at all since we had only applied for Permanent Residency. Fast forward to approximately nine months later, we received the devastating news that our application for permanent residency was cancelled, meanwhile this whole time my dad had been hard at work trying to supply us with enough money.

Hearing this disheartening news, everyone in my family was broken, hopeless, and pessimistic, except for my mum who applied again in hopes of getting a different result this time. I remember her mentioning something very similar to the passage: Matthew 20:1-16. She explained that God was the landowner, the people who worked for him were all of humanity, and the money symbolised His love for us. It didn't matter if someone was homeless, suffering mental illnesses, or a sinner, God will forgive them and love them the same as everyone else if they're truly genuine. Her strong faith helped keep my personal faith stable and allowed me to see this hurdle in our life as just that: a hurdle, not a pit stop. She started looking for jobs and started as an intern in my old primary school as a scripture teacher in hopes of becoming something more, which took about another nine months. Now it was approximately one and a half years after we had initially applied, my dad was still supplying us with money when we received the news that we had finally successfully achieved our Permanent Residency. My whole family was ecstatic and joyous. However, there was one concern, the government still wasn't supplying my family with a sufficient amount of money. It was after several attempts of meetings, persuading, providing documents that they, after several months, started supplying some money. Overall, this whole process was very frustrating for my whole family, especially getting to witness, firsthand, how unjust and inequitable our economy really is, but the only person who kept her head up high and never gave up, giving the rest of us some hope, was my mum.

When thinking about low-paid & underpaid workers, or even people who need severe economic assistance, we fail to stop and consider all of the people with jobs who have

mental disabilities. Statistics show that approximately 10,000 Australians with mental disabilities are paid only 99 cents an hour, which is infuriating. This is a clear example of how unjust and discriminative our economy really is, especially towards people suffering from mental illnesses that are out of their control. This should get our whole community's blood boiling due to how unjustly they're treated, but because of misinformation or inadequately informed people, barely anyone knows about these unjust behaviours. "...it's just been terribly frustrating. They make you feel as though I'm some kind of cheat, and I haven't had income since April 2012."-Janet, speaking of Centrelink's 'Robo-debt' recovery system. Low-paid workers, such as people with mental health issues, are most exposed to poverty, insecurity, and exploitation, without them even realising it. To combat this unjust idea, we need to assist people with mental disabilities in developing their skills and educating them on various topics, which will surely help people with mental disabilities not only understand their jobs but also fit in better without being marginalised from society.

The Catholic Social Teaching message on Solidarity is very simple: it is the act of advocating for our neighbours and respecting them. Solidarity usually gets confused with feelings of compassion and pity towards the misfortune of others, however, truly, solidarity dives much deeper than that. Solidarity is the endless determination towards wanting to create a change in our unjust community, which is only achievable when everyone works together in a philanthropic manner towards a set goal.

In Mount Druitt, where supposedly, there are many homeless people living on the streets, we could all work together to raise better awareness in our community. If our community doesn't know the depths of the issue, then how are they able to help? We

need to all work as a community, in solidarity, to raise awareness within not only our Mount Druitt community, but also slowly everywhere else. Another way we can work in solidarity to reduce the huge impacts of this crisis is by holding brief community meetings. Although gathering everyone in the community can be very difficult, getting together most people, who can pass the information discussed with the rest of them, can be very beneficial. If we're working together in solidarity, we need to work as the strong community we really are. We have to start by discussing the issue, and what better way to do it than having a communal meeting?

As a community we should consider Jesus' teachings and morals when making a decision; what would Jesus do if He were in our shoes? Jesus loves all of His people; doesn't matter if you're successful, homeless, or struggling in the middle somewhere. In order to find all of the predominant teachings of Jesus, which assisted in my research, I dug deeper into the passage, Matthew 20:1-16. The one denarius given to every worker is comparable to our idea of a 'minimum wage'. The workers are given exactly what they need to pay for their housing expenses and possibly food as well. The most interesting part is that the landowner didn't keep the standard of his market in the centre of his mind, but the dignity and rights of a human. Although the Church does not believe that the ideal world is achievable, God wants us to take part in a social transformation which focuses most on loving our neighbours and looking at every person as an individual, unique, and precious human, where the economy serves everyone, not just some because of gender, race, sexuality, etc.

Although raising money, food, and clothing for the homeless and unfortunate, with organisations such as Winter Appeal, Angelicare, St Vincent de Paul Society, The

Salvation Army, etc, is very helpful, they need something deeper. Yes, they need those things to essentially survive, but what we're missing is giving them psychological help. For example, they might just use the money we give them for cigarettes, but we don't provide them with the services they need to break that addiction. Another example is that we give canned goods and other foods to armies and war survivors, but we don't give them the mental treatment they need for their PTSD or other mental illness. Hence, we need to know and research the issue to better understand what they need.

After analysing our community and various different excluded groups, I've come to the consensus that our economy is, in fact, unjust. After reflecting on my own story, a problem faced by many people nowadays, the alienated groups from our community, and what we can do, in solidarity, to combat this huge humanitarian crisis, I've realised that the only way to create change in our unjust society and economy, is by abiding by Jesus' teaching and working together in solidarity to face this problem. We need to start by collecting information from people who are excluded and at the very bottom to know exactly what they need. Then, by working with the whole community, we can come up with strategies, which end all discriminative behaviours in our economy. I will leave you to reflect with a final thought, why does money drive us in our lives and where to? In the end, aren't we all going to the same place?

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