

Pastoral Reflection
25th Sunday, Ordinary Time
September 17-18, 2022

Today's readings focus on greed and corruption. This reflection from Fr. Albert Nolan and Fr. Richard Rohr discuss how the poor and peasants were exploited and oppressed by corrupt governments and the rich. How do we counter this corruption today?

Reading the Signs of The Times

Author and Dominican priest Albert Nolan has written many prophetic works that bring attention to systems of oppression throughout the world. His writings were influential in ending apartheid in his own nation of South Africa. Today he explains the spirals of violence that Jesus would have witnessed and encountered firsthand.

Prophets are typically people who can foretell the future, not as fortune-tellers, but as people who have learned to read the signs of their times. It is by focusing their attention on, and becoming fully aware of, the political, social, economic, military, and religious tendencies of their time that prophets are able to see where it is all heading.

Reading the signs of his times would have been an integral part of Jesus' spirituality.

In the first place, like many of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus must have seen the threatening armies of a powerful empire on the horizon—in this case the Roman Empire. Imperial power was well known to the prophets. At one time or another the people of Israel had been oppressed by the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the Greeks. The prophets warned against collaborating with these power structures and promised that each of them would one day decline and fall—which they did. In this the prophets saw the finger of God.

In Jesus' view, it would only be a matter of time before the Roman armies felt sufficiently provoked to attack and destroy Jerusalem. . . .

For most Jews, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem would mean the destruction of their worship, their culture, and their nation. Jesus' concern was not for the future of the temple but for the people of Jerusalem, especially the women and children who would suffer so much at the hands of the Romans (Luke 19:44; 21:21-24).

What Jesus must also have seen was the spiral of violence in which the Galilean peasants were caught up...Jesus himself would have been a peasant...Peasants were not only poor, they were exploited and oppressed—and not only by the Romans, but also by the Herods and the rich landowners.

Jesus, reading the signs of the times from the perspective of a Galilean peasant, would have seen that this spiral of violence held no hope for the poor and the oppressed. The people were powerless and helpless [*and the victims of huge structural violence which is largely invisible except to those who are suffering from it.* –RR]

Two thousand years later, prophets still raise their voices against the spirals of violence that continue to rob the poor and the oppressed of hope. Do we even hear them? Are we any more likely to act on their wisdom than our biblical ancestors or do we also dismiss them and their message? I'm afraid it's the latter, but it is only by choosing the former that we play our part as disciples of Jesus.

Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Orbis Books: 2006) 65-66.
Richard Rohr, *Reading the Signs of the Times*, Center for Action and Contemplation, March 17, 2020.