

HOMILY HINTS

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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE – What Is It, And Are We Aware Of It?

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Most of us may not have heard of the term environmental injustice before, but it is just a new word for an old problem. Environmental justice is based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental pollution and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment. Environmental Justice is the equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies and the equitable distribution of environmental benefits. (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2002:2).

Environmental injustice has existed for long, considering the fact it is mostly the prosperous and wealthy people who have access to good water, good housing, good protection good environment and overall a good healthy lifestyle while the poor live in detrimental conditions which eventually leads to multiple deprivations. This pattern has been seen commonly over the ages in most places and societies, that it has been accepted to be like any other natural phenomenon. It is only in the recent past that Environmental Justice has found a voice and is trying to address these issues.

The concept of Environmental Justice and need for it was first recognized in the United States of America. This concept was further developed in the US and has spread across the globe. To be fair, it must be said that this is such a complex issue that there are no black and white answers. Nevertheless there is much work to be done in this area on a practical working basis.

It is clear that environmental injustices do exist, especially in urban areas. It is impossible to eradicate these injustices all of a sudden, but it must be acknowledged that something has to be done regarding this in the future. Local authorities must be aware of these issues and the probable consequences it may have in the near future. Local authorities must take it as their responsibility to deal with this at the grass root level. Ignoring and neglecting these issues may not have any direct effects immediately, but it can have future repercussions. The Bhopal gas leak of 1984 which killed about 2500 people continues to have a negative impact on the lives of the people living around the area. This is a well known example of environmental injustice in India among many others.

So what can we do, to prevent environmental injustice and to bring about true environmental justice? Well, the first thing would be to make ourselves aware of the issues facing our country today that are displaying environmental injustice. Next, we need to get involved. A good place to start might be at environmental NGOs based in India. They work towards achieving environmental justice mainly by campaigning through media.

The Lord tells us through the prophet Isaiah that “we must care for justice.” St. Paul in the second reading reminds us that “God never takes back his gifts.” The gift of environment has been used and abused to full measure and today we are reaping the outcome of that. Just as the Lord Jesus was asked to address an unhealthy situation and bring healing to the daughter of the Canaanite woman, we seek his blessings on our efforts to bring healing to the environment