

Scripture Reflection. January 2025 Holy Year “Pilgrims of Hope”.

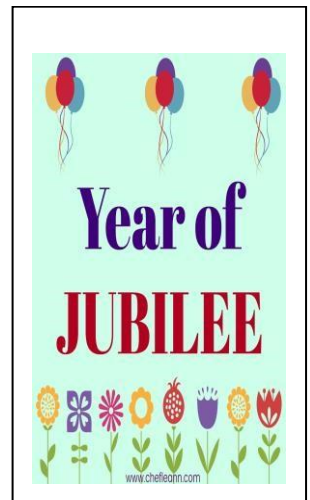
We tend to think that declarations on human rights are quite modern e.g. The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which was signed in 1948 after the horrors of the war. Article 1 said “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. We also have the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg which was permanently established 1998 which has 47 European countries who are signatories including Britain. This court has legal powers to protect individuals from certain abuses.

But a much older precursor of these statements on human rights can be seen within our religious tradition in the Book of Deuteronomy, which dates to about 700 years before Jesus. It can be seen within the regulations of a Year of Jubilee. It is based in the agricultural economy of Israel where men owned a piece of land within their tribal boundaries, which they farmed and provided for themselves and their families. If the man died however their widows and orphans were left destitute so it was the role of the tribal head to look after them. This rarely happened and we read many times of the plight of widows and orphans. If the land was sold and a man was so poor he went into slavery, the land was supposed to be returned after a period of 7 years. This was called the Year of Jubilee; a year of debt forgiveness. Again, this rarely happened as people were too mean to let go of land and slaves, but the law was there. C.B. Samuel says that it was an ideal that “the people of God would know the intention of God, the heart of God”.

As Christians, the words of Jesus are very important to us and he begins his mission by quoting from the scroll of Isaiah which refers to the ancient law of Jubilee as he says “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18). The year of the Lord’s favour was in fact the year of Jubilee which Jesus himself fulfils.

We can see that the idea of Jubilee for the disciples in Acts of the Apostles was to live permanently in this spirit. They shared all their goods amongst each other and cared for widows and orphans, for those who were destitute, and operated a daily distribution of bread. People were so impressed with these followers of Jesus that many thousands joined them because of their joy and compassion.

Pope Francis has dedicated this next year of 2025 as a Holy Year, a Jubilee Year with the theme of “Pilgrims of Hope”. It is in the background of the last 25 years of great social upheaval: Covid, mass migration, war and economic crisis that we are called to remember that we live in “brotherhood” and our God is one of love and compassion.



When Jesus says that “today this scripture has been fulfilled he is saying that not every 50 years or 7 years, but every now, every today- when you come across injustice, when religious systems shut people out- this is where Jubilee is fulfilled” Merryl Blair

“Part of the job of the church is to be alert to those prophetic voices, to lift them up, let other people hear them- and that itself is a prophetic voice. Because if imagination doesn’t change, nothing changes.” Merryl Blair

