

## LIVING JUSTLY IN THE MIDST OF AFFLUENCE

*The scriptures are full of warnings about the dangers of riches. They also describe the poor as 'blessed'. How easily do these principles sit inside modern culture? This article supplied by the Archdiocese's Catholic Social Justice Commission briefly explores this issue.*

Jesus famously said that 'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God'. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that the poor are 'happy' (or, in some translations, 'blessed').

Richard Tawney was a well known economic historian and fervent Christian who wrote and taught in the last century. He may well have had the same idea in his mind when he said that 'what thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty more thoughtful poor people call the problem of riches'.

Writers with a more secular perspective have also recognised the point. John K Galbraith said cynically that 'wealth is not without its advantages and the case to the contrary, although it has often been made, has never proved widely persuasive'. He then added, however, that 'beyond doubt wealth is the relentless enemy of understanding'.

The Catholic Church in its social teaching echoes this wisdom. Time and again it refers to the continuing scandal of conspicuous consumption in the midst of abject poverty. We also now know, and the Church has much to say, about the tremendous and urgent threat that wasteful lifestyles pose to the Earth..

It is easy, of course, to accept all this in principle. It is quite another thing to live it. When all is said and done, it is difficult to remain connected with our society if we do not participate to some extent in its lifestyle. What can we do?

We can work for an Australia that is inclusive and shares its resources more justly - for many of us, this means advocating changes that reduce our own economic privileges. We can stand for justice and peace in our workplaces, families and communities. We can work for a world in which power and wealth are distributed more fairly. We can directly assist those in need through personal service - sometimes within our families, sometimes outside them, and often both. We can contribute a genuinely substantial share of our financial resources to people in need, either directly or through organisations that serve them. We can reduce our levels of consumption and increase our recycling effort.

In short, while we cannot all do everything, each of us has some role to play in making God's world a better place. The opportunities are all around us. We need only to look for what is open to us and suits our gifts. We know we are not alone. As St Paul said in his letter to the Romans (12:4-5) 'though not all parts have the same functions, we are one body in Christ'.

Source: Catholic Voice, November 2009, "justice matters", Page 14. [www.cg.catholic.org.au](http://www.cg.catholic.org.au)

PS What *am I* doing? What *could I be* doing?