

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY 18th April 2016

Good Morning

On the flight back from Lesbos Pope Francis showed journalists a drawing by a young migrant girl. In it a boat is sinking, people are drowning and the sun is shedding tears into the sea. The caption? "Help us". The message went to the Pope's heart and he took with him back to Italy three Muslim families including six children.

The Vatican called it a 'gesture of welcome', adding it was 'purely humanitarian and religious in nature and should not be seen as a criticism of the deportations'.

'Gestures' are the currency of religious people. Kneeling, making the sign of the Cross are all gestures. Actions packed with meaning. And as the Pope blessed those in the camps with a chorus of migrants chanting 'Freedom' in the background he was using this gesture to draw the 'attention of the world to (a) grave humanitarian crisis'.

But as well as these motives the Pope's gesture was also surely political. Inevitably it will have consequences for the debate if not the policies of the European nations.

One of the complexities of the migrant crisis is that there are ethics on both sides of the debate. Therefore the politics are not straightforward. The ethics of the Good Samaritan are pitted against the ethics of resisting the evil of people trafficking.

Perhaps the Vatican was anticipating criticism that the Church shouldn't get involved in politics. But the Pope's already commented on issues in the Donald Trump campaign and just before he left for Lesbos met briefly with Bernie Sanders. When challenged by a journalist about meddling in politics the Pope with his typical directness suggested anyone thinking that should 'look for a psychiatrist'.

But should any religious leader be coy about being political?

One of the biggest misunderstandings of faith flows from some words of Jesus when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world". But on closer inspection Jesus is heard saying something very different. Face to face with Pontius Pilate who thinks he has power over him Jesus replies, "My kingship is not from this world".

In other words, "I'm answerable to a higher authority". The One who calls us to apply the values of the Kingdom of God to human affairs. That's politics! At least with a small 'p'.

So when the Pope looks at the child's drawing, now in his study, with the sun weeping over the Aegean Sea he has every right, perhaps even a religious duty, to make his political gesture.

The Right Reverend James Jones.