



**MASS AT THE LONDON MEETING OF THE FOUNDATION  
“CENTESIMUS ANNUS”**

Homily notes of  
**Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin**  
Archbishop of Dublin

-----  
Notre Dame University in England, 1 February 2019

In 1987, the then Pontifical Commission “*Iustitia et Pax*” published a document on the *International Debt Question* as a Church response or comment on the then dramatic debt crisis in Latin America.

The response from Church circles in Latin America was very positive, not just that the Church addressed what was for them a crucial theme but also for the manner in which the Church, springing from reflections of Christian teaching, addressed a complex question of international economic relations.

As the then newly appointed Undersecretary of the Pontifical Commission, I was invited to London to speak with representatives of British financial and banking institutions and present the new document.

I was very much a novice and hoped it would not be too much of an ordeal and that my very basic knowledge of them would not become evident too soon. I arrived at Archbishops House in Westminster with some time to spare and be prepared. Shortly before nine-o’ clock, Rolls Royce’s began arriving at the Cardinal’s residence and a very formidable group of men began to gather. To put it mildly they were not overwhelmed with enthusiasm by our document. Apart from one speaker who declared that the document was “actually dangerous”, most of the comments were polite but decidedly negative.

As the day wore on, the mood changed a little but while there were no converts made, one of the more conflictual gentlemen said to me on the way out: “You know Father I am a Catholic. I am regularly asked by the Church for help with fundraising or when something goes wrong with the finances of our Catholic school and I am always happy to help. However, I must thank you because this is the first time that the Church has challenged me to look more deeply in to certain dimensions of my day-to-day work in the area international finance”.

We gather in these two days as a Catholic Foundation to undertake an *Ethical Debate on Finance and Technology*. It is a complex topic. It is not just that the thematic is complex and in constant evolution. It is not that those who work in the area are unethical, though some are. The challenging question is that of the complexity of identifying where the roots of ethical debate in this area are to be rooted and how we can formulate an ethical language that responds adequately and realistically to the challenge.

We have just heard two parables about the kingdom of God and about how Jesus taught in parables. The farmer sows the seed and then leaves it while he continues his normal activities but one day the moment comes for decision. The mustard seed reminds us how we can misread and underestimate what can grow from small beginnings.

Parables are complex. Often they have a single meaning that we grasp immediately. Our parables this morning are slightly different. They are mysterious parables. The context seems in some way to affirm that the teaching of Jesus was likely to be unintelligible to the mass of his hearers. To our media-driven culture that would seem to be a self-defeating strategy.

They are parables of ambiguity. Then they are accompanied by the mysterious phrase that Jesus somehow provided his hearers with a clear application, “he explained everything”, when his disciples were on their own.

The application of ethical principles to secular matters is not a simple question. There can be different legitimate answers to resolving the same problem. It would be foolish to think that the Gospel provides direct answers to how we can create a more just and equitable world. Economic theories, on their side, can never apply the doctrine of infallibility to themselves.

Jesus may have explained to his disciples in secret the deeper meaning of his parables, but that was not transmitted to future generations of Church leadership.

Faith does not replace reason and the requirement to use and foster human ingenuity and creativity. In our reflection on complex questions on matters that affect people's lives, faith however is not irrelevant. It will not provide readymade answers, but faith leads us more deeply into understanding reality. Closeness to Jesus and his mystery can provide a context about humanity and the human family that leaves us uncomfortable about the readymade answers of others.

There are ways in which deeply lived faith can bring an added quality to the way we live and thus indirectly to our presence in the world.

Faith can give us a framework which call us to respect the dignity of each person, to understand how humankind was created as family within which we all share responsibility and how this humanity has been assigned its home within the integrity of God's creation.

May the Lord grant us his wisdom.