

## Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 8.07.2018

Over the last couple of decades, we've seen some amazing areas of progress in technology and the things we do from one day to the next, how quickly we can spend money with pay wave, for example. Just wait for the little machine to beep, and it's all gone - nothing to pay until the end of the month when it comes in, and then it's another story.

But one little area of development, that may be short-lived as digital newspapers become more prevalent, is the plastic wrapping on newspapers. The machines must be different because the one I got delivered in Geelong was a nightmare, you'd almost need a chainsaw to get it undone whereas the one delivered to my place now is very easy to get undone.

The days of the wet bedraggled newspapers in the gutter are a thing of the past. But just today, opening up the newspaper reminded me of a lady I spoke to some years ago. She told me that she'd gone out one morning to her front door to get the paper, and there with the paper in his mouth and wagging his tale, was a small dog she'd never seen before. She was delighted to see that he had delivered her paper to her front door. So, she went inside and got a couple of dog biscuits for him and he went off very pleased with himself.

The next morning, she went out and opened the door to get the paper and there was the dog again, this time with eight papers around him - from all of the neighbours! She spent the rest of the morning trying to find out whose papers the dog had brought to her.

Such is the power of the reward system. We all respond very positively to affirmation and praise. It can go a little bit overboard at times. There is a lot of debate about this approach, especially at schools where everybody gets a prize, or a medal, or a certificate of participation. A lot of commentators will say, perhaps with a degree of wisdom, that somewhere along the line we don't get rewarded for something that is second rate, or being lazy, or not really trying, or just turning up. That is not necessarily good enough and is not going to teach us some of the other lessons we need to learn in life.

But while that is true, the whole notion of affirmation and what we can achieve when we can give praise to people, even with children when it is deserved, and Mothers know this, and hopefully Dads as well. When presented with totally useless gifts on Mother's Day, they respond with praise to the smudgy painting by saying, what a beautiful painting it is, because if the child is proud of it and feels good about it, then some sort of praise and affirmation is really necessary and valuable.

I read a story about a famous Australian painter, who as a little child had presented Mum or Dad with these beautiful works of art when they were three or four years old – and they were actually no different to the works of art of another three or four-year-old – but they were praised for it. And as a result of that encouragement and praise their talent had developed and ultimately a lifetime calling, and career and passion was established in this painter who became one of Australia's foremost painters. What had been produced was something that objectively was pretty dreadful, but the encouragement was enough for him to realise that this was something worth doing and worth continuing with.

The whole capacity that we have, in praise, to be able to bring out the best in people is one of our greatest gifts, and sadly it can be one of the gifts we use all too little. The Gospel today is around that theme. It's about Jesus being unappreciated among his people. He's grown up among them. They have heard his words. They have seen his actions. But they say, 'Who is this guy big-noting himself?' They are not interested, even though the words they hear and the actions they see have entranced people in other places. They think they know it all, but they are prejudiced. They have prejudged this man who has come from among them but is now exhibiting an extraordinary capacity to heal and to teach and to preach. They shut down against him.

There was no encouragement. It is a fascinating insight into a part of Jesus that needs to be addressed and taken on board, in that Jesus could feel unappreciated as well. He had feelings, just as we all do. He responded to praise and encouragement. He certainly responded to discouragement and the sort of put down he experienced in his own place.

There are a few instances through the Gospel of this, for instance, where the lepers were cured and only one comes back. Here He says, 'The prophet is not appreciated in his own country'. The very place he feels he should be and could be and has a right to be, but it doesn't happen. We repeat that on so many levels. It is often put forward that so many people, in sport, music, the arts, even in business, must move away from Australia to prove themselves in the international area. You can justify this by saying it's a small world and we have to perform on the world stage and so on, but often it's not until somebody hits the bigtime further afield that they are truly appreciated.

So, we turn the clock back two thousand years to a totally different culture, but the underlying theme is still the same. The question is asked of us: Do we appreciate those closest to us? Do we appreciate our own family members? Do we appreciate husbands and wives appreciating each other, siblings recognising the value of each other? Do we appreciate the talent of schoolmates without being jealous? Therein lies one of the problems, that green-eyed monster of jealousy. How dare someone excel at something we are not as good at?

We're all the same. I can remember at school, one kid in my class. He was absolutely brilliant. He excelled at everything, he excelled at his studies, was a champion footballer and cricketer, he had film star looks, he had everything, and we hated him for it. As we do. We wouldn't say that, ask the question, why does he have all of this? But that's that green-eyed monster of jealousy, and prejudice.

Jesus experienced it as well, and he felt it. On a positive note though, it reminds us, if we go back, of the power of affirmation and acknowledgement. All day, every day we are surrounded by people who are having a go, giving it their best shot, whatever it might happen to be, trying, failing and trying again. A sense of encouragement that we can give each other is one of the most important things we can offer.

We only have to think back to what a difference it has made to ourselves when someone has rung us up to say, 'Hey, you did really well with that', or, 'I really admired you for saying that in that circumstance.' Maybe you took a different perspective, or spoke out about something that made someone think, and they rang you up to say that that had made all the difference and they have valued that. We think, 'Gee, that was worthwhile'. And it was because they have learnt a lesson and valued it.

About twenty years ago, a good friend of mine who was into sound systems, revamped the whole sound system at St Patrick's Cathedral when it wasn't functioning well at all. Someone mentioned what follows to him and he took it on board very strongly, 'Don, do you realise that in fixing a sound system at a place as significant as St Patrick's Cathedral, that people have heard words at weddings and funeral masses that would have been a jumble otherwise, and as a result they have been comforted, inspired, and assisted in any number of different ways? Your expertise in your field has made that possible for them.'

He was not a religious person, but he was a man who was great at what he did, and he was a man of great integrity, and he was really chuffed by that. It was a great encouragement to him, and I mentioned that at his memorial service today.

Encouragement and affirmation is a great gift. It is not meant to be kept in a cupboard. We can be quick to discourage and criticise. But the power of affirmation is so good. It's good for dogs ... but it's good for us as well, and we should share it around as we never know what can be achieved by that pat on the back. That word of encouragement can make all the difference.