

Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 29.07.2018

Maybe it's through the internet, maybe it's just what happens, but we get a lot of, sort of buzz words that come around from time to time that, somebody must start them to begin with, then they just sort of gravitate a bit of pace and then all of a sudden they're being used by everybody here, there and everywhere. One of those words, or two words really, which gets used a lot in administration and staff meetings and that sort of thing are the words 'Problem Solve', which is almost, it's really a verb. It's not solving a problem, it's "We sat around and we problem solved, and how good that was, we'll wait and see". But it's become very structured and there are heaps of books and essays and journals that have been written on 'How to solve a problem?' And what's quite fascinating is the fact that, well we all have problems – you tell me yours and I'll tell you mine and that's how it goes on.

But, in applying some sort of a strategy to solve our problems, do we just sort of do the first thing that comes into our head or do we think it through a bit? And this whole sort of buzz thing of problem solving is, and to problem solve (verb) has something to offer in its own strange way. And it's interesting particularly when we pick up a gospel, like the story so well known, of Jesus feeding the multitude. This is a fantastic story, or there's at least two instances of it in the gospel that's told in nearly all of the gospels in different ways and we pick up different elements of the story from the different versions that we read. But the one tonight from St. John is fairly substantial. So what do we want to do if we want to problem solve (verb)? First thing we do is to recognize that a problem exists, identify it and defining it. I remember listening to a magnificent song by a fellow called Joe Walsh in the Eagles. Joe Walsh is a recovering alcoholic, he's been off the grog for over 20 years.

But in a song called 'One day at a time' – that's not the Hawking brothers' 'One day at a time', it's a different one altogether. He talks about how he went from a life of almost oblivion through alcohol to highly successful as a musician and an expert guitarist. He starts off by saying "I finally had to admit that there was a problem", and a few verses further on he says "I finally had to meet that I, was the problem". But to get back to Jesus in the multitudes and the feeding, is there a problem? Yes there is – it's all these people here, there's no 7/11s, there's no shopping centre, they've

come here just following Jesus in their enthusiasm and there is a problem. So at least the apostles and Jesus have said “We’ve got an issue here”. Now that might seem very fundamental, but it is amazing how often everybody else can see a problem, except the people so centrally concerned and especially addiction and so on is a perfect example of that. Disharmony in the family home can be a perfect example.

Is there a problem or isn’t it? So step 1 – Identify the problem. Then structure the problem by having a period of observation, make a careful inspection, determine the facts and develop a clear picture of the problem. Now this all sounds like stuff out of a manual, and indeed it is. But you apply it back to Jesus and what we’ve got here – we’ve got all these people without any food and in another gospel we are told that it is getting late, etc., what are we gonna do, we haven’t got anything. The apostles come to Jesus and they say “We can’t fix this, we’ll go to Jesus to fix it”. Not a bad move as it turns out. But to say we need help, we have a problem, we can’t fix it ourselves, we need help. Then we move on – What are the possible solutions? – Well you can’t say go home cause it’s too far. You can’t say go to 7/11 because they weren’t have to be invented for another 2000 years.

But they say, “Well what can we work with?”, and they find this little kid there. We’re told that they have very little food but they have some food. So they go to Jesus and Jesus says, “What do you have?” He says “Well, we’ve just got this - five loaves and two fish. Jesus says, well we’ve looked at alternatives, they’re not going to work, but maybe we can start with this one. So, make a decision. Holding back from doing anything will get nowhere. It will just fluctuate – can we do this, can we do that, whatever and nothing will happen. One of the clearest ways of meeting a solution to a problem is to eventually having done steps 1 to 3, make a decision and say “This is the best one, as best we can determine it, and this is what we’re going to do”. So they say, “Well, Jesus it’s in your hands”. He says “Right, here you go, five loaves, two fish, baskets – here they are, divide them up amongst yourselves and off you go, and I will do the rest”. And indeed, He did.

So, he sent them off amongst the five thousand. Somehow or other, they kept putting their hands into the baskets and it was always something there for the next person.

An amazing situation, but these things happen. Not just in this area as told in the gospel, but in so many areas, there is the fact that God provides for us in ways that we could never even begin to imagine. It might seem so far-fetched, so out of reach, so impossible and yet somehow, we figuratively put our hand back into the basket thinking its empty and something happens. Someone knocks on the door, someone makes a phone call, someone send us a note or an email, someone leaves something on the back porch and all of a sudden things are, if not magically changed, at least sustainable. So we carry out that course of action and afterwards we, as the apostles do, he says "Go and collect the left overs, and there's so many leftovers, well and truly above the five loaves and two fish they started with.

So, we look back and we say, how did it go? What did we do to make this work? Well, in this case and in so many cases, we look to the fact that we've identified a problem, we've looked for the alternatives and in the inspirational action of the apostles, we've done something that might not necessarily be in the administration manuals, we brought it to Jesus, we bring it here, we bring our sadness, we bring our anxiety, we bring our dilemmas, we bring our fears, and we say "I've done what I can, I've got to leave the rest up to you. And indeed I would imagine, I would believe that even the fact that we're here, probably means that somewhere along the line, that might have been yesterday or today, it might have been years ago, that we went down that path in some important area of our life and may be even unconsciously, we went through those steps of problem solving and somehow or other it worked out, somehow or other the Lord stepped in and something unforeseen, maybe even unbelievable happened and all of a sudden, we could see clearly – because the rain had gone, we had no more obstacles in our way.

The whole notion of solving problems is a part of life for each and every one of us every day and this little story, this marvellous story of the feeding of the multitude is just such a great example to us to say "Don't let it envelop you, don't let it crush you, whatever it is, there is no problem that cannot be managed. The amazing thing about this is that, as in so many of the gospel stories, the contrast between what has to be accomplished and what they have to start with. But Jesus says "You put in what you've got, you do your best, you're not being let off scot-free, whatever you've got, go out and do it and you leave the rest to me". How we apply that to our own

situations of challenges, of loss of pain of suffering – well it's up to us to go down that path, particularly maybe in the areas of relationships which are a struggle maybe, which are hurtful, which are damaging. How do we fix this up? We do what we can, we leave the rest to the Lord.

But at least by acknowledging that there is a problem, by looking for the solutions, very importantly by making a decision and then being game enough after putting it in the hands of Jesus to put it into action, then maybe we have learnt in that new verb of the buzz language of today, we have learnt a little better – how to problem solve.