

Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 11.08.18

Some of the teachings of Jesus, and his most effective teachings, were in the context of parables. Stories that had a meaning and a lesson for us. And that's one of the reasons that I justify the fact that from time to time, I refer to the stories in country songs. Now I know that there are some people out there, and some people out in Radio land, listening to this on Light FM. who think that country music is just an abomination. Well too bad, at least for now. Don't worry, I'm not gonna play the song for you and this reason is that I can't find it. I searched all over the internet for it, and it's corny and schmaltzy- it's probably pretty hopeless but it's got a great message.

It's the story, amazingly enough, of a young cowboy. That's very strange for a country song isn't it? He grows up on a farm, and he decides to leave the farm and go and seek his fortune. It's a bit like that song 'Don't take your guns to town' but it's a different one than that. So he says to his mother, "I can't stay here anymore, I've gotta grow up and find my way around living, and I'll have to go." The mother says "I'm very sorry to have you leaving, but will you promise me one thing? I'm giving you a Bible. You've got to promise me to read your bible every day." So off he goes, and the bible is placed in a little bag on his horse, and everything else is piled on top of it. He goes and seeks his fortune, but his fortune is not too good at all. He falls on very hard times, it's sort of a Prodigal Son type story. He is desperately poor, and as a result of that he performs a holdup. So he messes that up, because he's not a criminal type. He's thrown into prison, and he's got nothing to read but his bible. So he picks up the bible, starts to thumb through it. And there, 10 pages down, is a \$10 note. And he turns over a few more pages and there's another \$10 note and so on. Had he done what his mother told him to do, he wouldn't have had to holdup the stage coach, and he wouldn't have been in prison. He just didn't do what his mother told him to do, silly fellow.

He'd been carrying this book around all the time, within that book was the answer to all his issues. Had he kept the simple promise he kept to his mum, he would never have gotten into the strife that he did. And the lesson of course, is that so often, the answer to our issues, problems, worries and stresses is right in front of us. We just don't realise that. And how much we should try and take notice of what's there. Jesus was with the people who knew him. Some people knew him from birth. "We know this fellow, so we're not going to take any notice of him. Here he comes with his preaching and his teaching. But we know his family, he's just one of the kids from down the road. He might've grown up a bit, but we're not going to take any notice of him." And the rest of the story of course, we know so well.

But it's interesting within the context of the promise of the Eucharist, that things begin to go a bit pear shaped. Initially for Jesus, but down the track, pear shaped for those who had such an extraordinarily powerful gift in front of them but didn't notice it. And before we get too critical of those who said we know Jesus and don't want to take notice of him. Maybe we need to think about where we stand in terms of how much we value that same gift. We can come to church, receive holy communion and that's terrific. But how much do we really let it sink in what this is all about. The whole power of faith is quite extraordinary. During the week we had the feast of St. Laurence who was one of the early martyrs. He died around the year 250AD. So

persecution of Christians, and by persecution we mean really savage stuff. In different parts of the world and the Roman Empire, people having to live underground in catacombs: we know all those stories and we know the reality of it.

In order to live and embrace the Christian faith, they had to take on board the very real and actual potential many times, that they would pay for this with their lives. What an extraordinary act of faith that is. And they were prepared to celebrate mass, to pray, and to profess their faith in Jesus. Even at the cost of their lives. And that went on, not for a little while, but for 300 years. And in fact it's still going on today, in different parts of the world, it's never really ceased from that. What is the faith of people who are prepared to do that? And then we think about ourselves. We're the church just down the road, with the freedom to express and practice our faith and so on, and we don't take much notice of it. We have this weekend and next weekend, maybe 60 families of first communicants who will make a prayer of preparation, and we will say a prayer to support them, that they will take on board this extraordinary gift that we have in the Eucharist. It's so easy for us to just dismiss it because it's so familiar and always available to us. And it's always there.

I remember reading a story years ago. And it really impressed me to the degree that I've never forgotten it. It was about people in the remote part of Alaska or Iceland or some freezing cold place in the northern hemisphere. And because it was so remote, there was a small group of Catholics there, and they would have mass once a year. They couldn't get a priest because it was too remote, and this might've been before the days of helicopters. But they did what they could. And if they could, once a week they would gather around the little piece of cloth called the corporal, on which the chalice sits at mass. It was their only physical connection with Eucharist. They didn't have holy communion, so that little piece of cloth was so important to them because it connected them with the Eucharistic Jesus. These are the things which challenge us I suppose, to take on board the gift that we've got, to not just take it for granted.

Sure we're familiar with it, in just the same way that the people in the Lord's own hometown were familiar with Him. But some of them missed out, simply because they chose to. Let's not choose to go down that path. Maybe as we hear little children soon to receive their first communion, we can pray not only for them, but pray that we ourselves will truly value that gift of the Eucharist. And that its accessibility, its readiness and its availability is not something that just lets us sit back and take it casually and take it for granted. But maybe as we watch these little children come up and say their prayer and then we pray for them, we can really take on board the gift of what that truly is. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.