

Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 26.08.18

Question without notice – how many of you have at some stage in your life owned or been the carer of a dog? I don't believe that, about four people put their hands up. Your dogs are watching you, be they living or deceased. How many of you have a dog? There that's more like it, of course you have. Now I didn't put my hand up, I've never owned a dog, my brother, when he was at Epping as parish priest, he had a beautiful Gordon setter, lovely dog. But I've never owned a dog but I like dogs and one of the things about dogs is they do form a very special bond for the most part with their owners. I'm not sure about pitbull terriers or whatever, but that's another story I guess. But, if you ever in need of a good cry, get a movie called Hachiko. Richard Gere was the star, it came out about 8-9 years ago and it's actually based on a true story which came out of the 30s in Japan.

It's a story of, I think in the more modern movie, he's a university lecturer and he has his beautiful dog that he finds and takes care of, he and his wife. His wife doesn't like it too much, but he just loves his dog. And the dog goes to the railway station everyday with him as he goes off to the university. And one day when he is lecturing, he has cerebral haemorrhage, and he dies and the dog of course is at the station waiting for him to come home and he goes there the next day and the next and the next. This is a true story out of the 30s and is re-modernized in this more recent movie. The dog went to greet his master every night for 10 years. It's an amazing story – one of these great one, there's even a statue of the dog somewhere in Japan I think, and if you want to see there's this little clip, it only goes for around 3-4 minutes, but it's not called Hachiko, it's called Hachi, this little clip. Joan Allen is a marvellous actress, she is the wife who comes back to the station somehow or other on the day and she sees the dog there 10 years after her husband has died.

It's a story of loyalty of an animal. It prompts a story of loyalty that we have to one another or sometimes that we don't have. I remember years ago listening to – it was an afternoon programme on 3AW. There was a lady host for the afternoon, I can't remember her name, it was quite some time ago. Anyhow, Ron Barassi was the interviewee for the afternoon and they were talking about the fact that players were moving from one club to another and it was interesting, because when Ron Barassi

left Melbourne all those years ago to go to Carlton, the world nearly collapsed, particularly for the Carlton barrackers. But he made a statement which is interesting in the light of his own experiences, but as a statement it's so true. He said "Loyalty is not loyalty until it is put to the test". It's one of those statements which I just heard on the radio when I was in the car, never forgotten it.

Now I don't know whether Ron Barassi made it up or whether he pinched it from George Bernard Shaw or someone like that – I don't know. But it's so true – loyalty is not loyalty until it's put to the test. And thinking about dogs, it was an old story years ago about this old man who loved his dog and he dies and goes to heaven, but he doesn't know that he's died until sometime he is walking along and he sees this big wall and pearly gates and he looks through the gates and there's streets paved in gold and there's a guy sitting at the pearly gates and he thinks, hmm maybe this is heaven. So he walks over and he says to the fellow "Can I come in?" and the fellow at the gate says "Yes, you can come in but your dog can't". He says "Oh well sorry, but my dog has been my faithful friend for 15 years, we've never been parted and I'm not going to be parted from him now. And the fellow says "Well you can't come in here, you better just keep walking on".

So he goes on a little bit further and he meets another guy down the road and he says "Is that your dog?" and he says "Yes, I tried to get into heaven down the road but they wouldn't let me in because I couldn't bring my dog with me". And the fellow says to him "No no no no you're wrong, that's not heaven down there at all. Might have the pearly gates and the streets paved in gold but that's not heaven. You'd find out if you went in". He said "This is heaven". He says "What do you mean?" He said "Well, down there are all the people who failed the test. They are the people who left their best friends behind". Loyalty in a dog, in a man and it's the story behind the story of this incident that we have in the gospel which is a very telling one, it's about something that comes to all of us, I suppose, when you think of it.

You think of the events of the past few days in Canberra and yeah, it would have been the difficulty in which many members of the liberal party especially, were going through in the sense of saying – Well where is my loyalty? Is my loyalty to my leader? Is my loyalty to my country? Is my loyalty to my family? – Because I might not have a job in a year's time if this all goes pear shaped as it may etc. etc. Where

is the loyalty? Where do we place it? What do we do first? Often there is a line in the sand that we all face on any number of different areas where our loyalty is tested. Never quite sure where that line in the sand question came from. Most people think it came from Colonel Travis at the Alamo, where he drew a line in the sand and those who were prepared to stand and fight – what was it General Santa Anna, I think from Mexico on the other side – those who wanted to stay, on one side of the line and those who wanted to go could go. And they all stayed, a great part of American history – the history of the Alamo.

So we've got that phrase of the line in the sand which is the test we can all have at different times. Sometimes we know it's coming, sometimes it comes without notice and we've got to make a decision very quickly of where our loyalties lie. And this is what came to the people following Jesus. Jesus drew a line in the sand because the miracles, the teaching 'Love one another', 'Treat each other the way you would like to be treated yourself' – all that was fine, "Look after each other" – yeah that was good. But 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him' – some said, the gospel says 'intolerable language' – translated into good Australian vernacular, it would be translated as something like 'fair crack of the whip' or something along those lines. In other words, we're just not prepared to listen to this, we don't care who you are, the good that you've done, the value of your words, the integrity of your life – sorry, we're not going to be part of this – and they went one side of the line and the apostles and others said "Well if we're not with you, who are we with?" and they stayed on the Jesus' side of the line.

That was the test for them of the Eucharist. It's also a test for us that we have, every time we think – well do I really want to go down the track of mass and the eucharist and so on, do I really believe, do I want to believe, do I choose to believe, whose side am I on, which side of the line in the sand, on which side do I stand? And it's a test, a test of loyalty – loyalty to the Lord in our life. Every time we pray, whether we've lost the car keys or we can't find a parking space – Hail Mary full of grace, find for me a parking space – that works 9 times out of 10, etc. etc. Every time we say "I'm not sure I'm ready for this exam, Lord help me to get the right answers or better still to get the right questions", etc. Every time we pray – I hope I can keep my job, every time we pray for someone that's sick – "Lord help to make him better, Lord

look after the doctors who are looking after him so that they know what they are doing”.

Every time we make reference to God in our life, we are asking for something. How genuine are we, because can we just pick and choose whenever it suits us or is this a friendship, is this a relationship in which we have total faith, because God is God and we're not? The line in the sand can be there for all of us. We never know when it's going to be there for us and it can be that maybe someone, can be something as simple as this – someone makes a remark that is may be blasphemous, may be something which is totally out of line and offensive, do we say “I don't like to hear you speak like this” or do we just remain silent and retreat into what might be sometimes, common sense because the old story applies – never start a fight you're not going to win?, or could be cowardice, could be that we're ashamed to acknowledge that we are a follower of Jesus Christ.

No I'm not going to do that, no I'm not going to be part of what you're proposing, because this is against what I believe Jesus wants me to do. Are we prepared to do that? The line in the sand is there for us all. The eucharist is one that's there all the time, but there are other more personal ones where our loyalty is put to the test. Dogs can be loyal, people can be loyal, the real question is “Can I be loyal to the things in which I claim – ‘I truly believe’”?

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