

## Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 1.09.2018

Over the years a lot of people have got into ancestry.com and traced back where they come from and who their forebears were. Some have gone back many many years indeed. I've never been a great student of all of that, but I had an experience a few years ago which had a big impact on me.

It would have been my second or third year at Geelong. I was asked to officiate at a wedding in a place called Boort in North West Victoria. I'd never been to Boort before. More importantly, I had never been to Charlton where my dad was born. So, I went up to do this wedding. It took a couple of hours from Geelong, but I found myself there quite early and I knew that Charlton was only twenty minutes away from Boort.

So, I thought, here's an opportunity after all these years to visit the place where my dad was born. I got into Charlton at about twelve thirty. The wedding at Boort was about two o'clock. I was a bit peckish, so I thought I'd get something to eat. I rolled up at the sandwich bar, just as he was closing the door so that was that.

But then I saw this place, the Vale of Avoca Hotel. That rang a bell, but I didn't realise why until I was waiting for my sandwich to be made there. They had these laminated placemats and there was a very old photograph of the same building, taken in 1906 and a big sign saying 'Proprietor, Roger Dillon' on them. That was my grandfather.

The penny dropped, and I realised that I was standing waiting for my ham sandwich, not only in my grandfather's hotel, but in the very building my father was born in about a hundred and ten years and three weeks ago. He was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1908. I can't tell you what affect that had on me. It was quite strange, after so many years, to be in this place that was so central to me. This was the place of my father's birth.

Driving home after the wedding, it felt very moving indeed to have had that experience of reconnection with where I've come from, and that greater sense of connection, I suppose, with my dad who died over twenty-five years ago now. In the father's days that have lapsed since then I've felt a stronger connection than ever through connecting with his beginning, which was very important.

Not long after that I read a story about Ron Barassi. He had gone to Libya where his father had died in World War 2. That sense of pilgrimage and connection with who and what we are is very much a part of the way we live our life and that sense of human connection.

Each and every one of us has got two things in common. No matter what our differences, we all have a mum and a dad. From there on, of course, the differences can be enormous. Some have a marvellous relationship with their dad. For others, it is maybe not all that spectacular. And for others, it could be very painful indeed.

There could be people here who hate Father's Day because whatever it was with their dad was not a good relationship. Maybe they fought all the time, maybe he dominated, maybe he stayed when he should have gone, maybe he left when he should have stayed. Countless stories. Maybe the other side of things that happens to most of us along the way, is when Dad's no longer there. Father's Day can be a very uncomfortable, a very difficult day full of, maybe if we are lucky, blessed, fortunate and warm memories, but also sadness and a sense of loss, because he's not there anymore to talk to, to help and guide us.

We each have entirely separate and individual stories, some good and some not so good, but nonetheless it is the bond that unites us. It is also, of course, central to the way in which we express our faith and connect with God himself. The apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus said, 'When you pray, pray this way. Our Father ...' and he gave us what we call, *The Lord's Prayer*.

And it is interesting that Jesus himself chose to encourage us to see God in this parental role because that was something we could understand, it was an experience we all have. That sense of giving life, responsibility, guidance, forgiveness, compassion ... all those things we look for within a father.

Back in 1960, I think it was, I was sent to Puckapunyal to do a course in the cadets. I wasn't supposed to go. I had been in the band in the cadets, then all of a sudden in the holidays, I got this call saying, 'We need someone to go on the Regimental Sergeant Major's Course.' I was not a Regimental Sergeant Major's bootlace, I can tell you, but nevertheless there was no-one else to go.

The brother in charge said, 'You're going.' So off I went to Puckapunyal for the worst week of my life. I was in totally unfamiliar territory. No-one wanted a drummer in the Regimental Sergeant Major's Course. So anyway, every day was about 45 degrees and it was just shocking. I failed the course. Surprise, surprise! The first time I'd failed anything in eleven years of school.

I remember coming home on the train, worrying about what Dad would think, how I was going to tell him. I wasn't worried about Mum, she couldn't care about RSM courses or whatever.

I told Dad when I got home. I will never forget his reaction. He said, 'Well, that's okay, you weren't prepared for it. Did you qualify for anything?'

I said, 'Yeah, I qualified as a sergeant,' and he said, 'Well, you go and be the best sergeant you can be.'

And I did.

With that sense of understanding he had basically said, I love you, no matter what.

I don't know how often I have thought of this little story of mine. I tell you that so that you can think of some warm and supporting story that you have in your life as we take on board what Jesus told us, and that sense of finding God. Because, the better we can understand our dad and our mums, the better we can understand the extraordinary forgiving, compassionate love of God for each of us.

Today is Father's Day and I thought I would share this little piece:

*Let us praise those fathers who have striven to balance the demands of work, marriage, and children with an honest awareness of both joy and sacrifice. Let us praise those fathers who, lacking a good model for a father, have worked to become a good father.*

*Let us praise those fathers who by their own account were not always there for their children, but who continue to offer those children, now grown, their love and support. Let us pray for those fathers who have been wounded by the neglect and hostility of their children.*

*Let us praise those fathers who, despite a marriage breakdown, have remained in their children's lives. Let us praise those fathers whose children are adopted, and whose love and support has offered healing.*

*Let us praise those fathers who, as stepfathers, freely choose the obligation of fatherhood and earn their step children's love and respect. Let us praise those fathers who have lost a child to death, and continue to hold the child in their heart.*

*Let us praise those men who have no children of their own, but cherish the next generation as if they were their own.*

*Let us praise those men who have "fathered" us in their role as mentors and guides.*

*Let us praise those men who are about to become fathers; may they openly delight in their children.*

*And let us praise those fathers who have died, but live on in our memory and whose love continues to nurture us.*