

Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 08.09.18

Over the last few months at the morning mass, we've had some very young attendees. By young I mean about 6 months or thereabouts. And I must say they are beautifully behaved. It's quite fascinating though looking at kids of that age- their awakening of life, and of people around them is just starting to stir. Their capacity to respond and take in what's around them. All we can do is look and wonder, as I guess we all do, and think: what is going on inside that little head? What are they taking on board, how are they responding, how are they gradually adapting and going to learn. None of the things they are taking on at that age will they remember, but they absorb things nonetheless. The whole notion of vision and hearing and even being able to make a noise and they can do that alright too.

What is it inside the human mind, not only when we're 6 months old but maybe 66 months or 66 years. The reality is, what we've all got between the ears is the most extraordinary mechanism that develops attitudes, personalities, the way we look at life, the way we alter the way we look at life, all of those things. There's something within there which is quite fascinating, and even the most learned of psychologists and behavioural scientists, psychiatrists and so on, really struggle to get on board amongst many other things, addictions.

Why is it that people can get hooked into a code of behaviour? It can be gambling, substance like alcohol or drugs, tobacco or whatever. Any number of different areas of addiction, it could be food. And they want to give it up. They want to change, they don't like what it does to them. And yet, there is something within their brain that seeks that craving and satisfaction. I would say there probably isn't a week of my life as a priest that I haven't run into at least one, if not many, for whom a whole area of addiction has been a real problem. And if it's a problem for one, it's a problem for lots of others. You name the addiction, there's someone that's got it.

And it's the fascinating thing that they want to change but they can't. Such is the way the human mind operates. I get my regular early morning taste of wisdom from two guys I listen to every morning, Ross and John. And John Burns, who used to be a lawyer, comes out with some real pearls every now and again. A common question they ask is, "have you ever changed your mind because you lost an argument?". It's a very good question, because one of the addictions we have is that sense of being right. And we can easily get addicted to being right all the time. Everyone's out of step except me. Of course every so often we might be right about that too. This is where the negotiating the path in life can be very tricky indeed. And we just need to be able to negotiate that as effectively as we can.

I can remember seeing a set of brochures that were very well produced from the States a few years ago. They had questionnaires for a couple to prepare to spending a committed life together as husband and wife. They encouraged them to fill out the questionnaires and come back and exchange the answers. One of the interesting ones was a list of characteristics, and they had to tick whether it applied to them or their partner. The most fascinating one was stubborn or strong willed. Having the courage of conviction is a very positive thing. They're not easily swayed by people who try to persuade them otherwise. Whereas stubborn means a train could come

along and threaten you, and you would stand firm and not budge an inch. Which is better? And that's the trick, trying to figure that out.

We've got a story in the gospel today in which Jesus encounters a man who is deaf. He cannot hear the wisdom and the goodness of those around him. And as a result of that deafness, he can't communicate too well. Jesus cures him with some interesting words and he says "be opened". Whether you translate that as be open or be opened, doesn't really matter. But in a sense Jesus is saying to us there are many occasions in life, we've got to pick which ones they are. And that's why we're here, that's what our prayer is about, what grace is about. To know, what are the areas of our life where we need to be open to an opinion, dare I say, other than our own. Where, perish the thought, we might be wrong. Some might say as I'm saying this "well that doesn't apply to me because I'm never wrong." But we all go down that path, we call life as we see it. And sometimes we're right. And sometimes we mess up badly and we look back and we just cannot understand why we thought as we did.

If there's one thing perhaps when people approach us and say to us "have you ever thought of this situation, or this person, or what you're doing, to others or yourself. Have you ever thought about it from a different perspective? Are you open to thinking about things a little differently?" Where we think well who is this person that is saying this to me, a lot hinges on that. If it is someone we respect and value. And especially if it's someone that cares from enough to maybe risk a negative reaction on our part, if we take offence, that's when we start to think clearly about this. So often down the track talking about addictions and the like, talk to families who just plead with someone in their family to try and get some help. To try and steer away from something that's taking them down the path that is only going to lead to unhappiness for them and everybody else.

But they are closed. There is a brick wall there, and no one can break through it. It is one of the most not only frustrating but so disappointing and sad elements of life and especially of, family life. We use the word trainwreck, and it's the story of someone on a mountain and they see a train coming towards impending disaster and there's nothing they can do about it. That's the origin of the word that we use when someone's life is a trainwreck. We can't communicate because they are closed. Maybe we know someone like that, and maybe there is something like that in our own lives. But it's worth asking the question, is there some element of my life where people who love me, who care about me, who I respect, are saying to me: hey, you need to do something about this? Or are there people that I can see who are going down the path of self-destruction. Down a path which is only going to lead to sadness and difficulty for them.

The prayer that we have in the gospel today where Jesus cures a man who is deaf, and then loosens his tongue so he is able to speak and communicate well, the two sort of go together. But the prayer is 'be open'. Maybe in our own stubbornness that we may read as strength of conviction, maybe there's this brick wall in our life, where we won't let anyone touch this particular element of our life. The sense of being open to those who love and care for us is extremely important and extremely valuable. It is God's grace, sure, to be able to pick those times when we need to be open, and those times when we need to stand firm. And that's what we're here for. To get that

grace, to have that prayer. There's no perfect answer, there's no way we can look it up on the computer or in a book or whatever. We have to find it within ourselves, not just between our ears in our mind, but within our heart. That's the way the way in which we pick life.

Be open, Jesus says to us, be open to my grace, be open to my love, and somehow even in the most extraordinary things, we can change. And we say "I can't change!" All we have to do is look back at some other part of our life, and we'll see how we have changed. We did change. And we mightn't have been knocked off our horse to change, it's just gradual. Somebody said something, somebody did something, and we started to see things differently. I can see clearly now that the rain has gone. I can see all obstacles in my way. Let's ask the Lord for the grace to what to change, and how to change it if it needs to be changed. Let's ask for the grace of openness to that possibility of change. And let's pray for those who need that grace themselves. And that's probably enough to give the Lord for this week. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.