

FR. KEVIN DHILLON'S HOMILY DATED 16TH SEPTEMBER 2018

Back in 1940, a young accountancy student from Camberwell just down the road signed up along with many others for Australia's participation in World War II when the battle of Britain was raging. He was an intelligent young man and good at Science and those sort of things, a good mind and he signed up to join the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and he became Bomber Command and was moved to England. He became part of what was known as the Dam Busters Squadron – No. 617 Squadron. His name was Pilot Officer Les Knight. I remember going to watch the movie, *The Dam Busters – 100 Years Ago*, I don't remember much of it except for some daring bombing raids over Germany by some British and Australian pilots and the Polish ones as well, I think – and a bouncing bomb had been invented by a fellow, I think his name was Barnes Wallace. The whole idea was the bomb could bounce over water it was more able to succeed than to pinpoint the target exactly.

(Refers to pictures shown of the bouncing bomb, Les Knight and the Eder Dam)

This is the Eder Dam, and his was the last flight over and if you look carefully you would be able to see the bomb bouncing over the water just behind him. And it was a successful area, not without its difficulties, a third of those who took part in those raids were killed. But Les Knight survived this. His story is told in the Herald Sun today. It is a remarkable story – not just from the Dam Busters Raid but a few months later, he was recognised, that was in the Sydney paper, that was in June, and a few months later in September, in fact, September 16th, 1943 – 75 years ago, this weekend, he was part of another raid over Germany and his plane sustained enormous damage and it was all he could do to keep it in the air til he got over the border of Holland. He devised the means that he couldn't keep it in the air and it would have to crash, he devised the means that he strapped parts of the control held on to himself, he knew that once he let go of those controls, the plane would have just plummet in seconds.

So he somehow held on, avoided crashing into a small Dutch village and all of the crew escaped except himself. He knew he had to go down with the plane and he did. That was the photo of the wreckage of the plane taken there (refers to photo).

He was buried in that vicinity and around there this weekend, he is being honoured again because not only did he save the crew, but keeping the plane going and avoiding the village that means that people, 75 years ago, who may have been children at that time, who are alive today, because of his courage and his heroism.

He is perhaps not all that well-known but a genuine Australian hero, from just down the road in Camberwell.

The word “hero” is tossed around a fair bit. Somebody kicks a goal after the siren, immediately they are heroes. Somebody who has success as a singer or an actor and they are a hero as well. It is a word that has encouraged a lot of debate whether it is overly used, or incorrectly used.

Most people when they really think about it say – to be a hero, you got to be more than a role model. You got to be more than a mentor. You got to be more than a good example. All of those things are great but people often grow up saying, “yes, so and so is my hero. I want to be like him or her as the case may be”. And that is a role model. Hero means that person has given something of themselves, may be an enormous risk, a sacrifice of something and in many cases, have sacrificed everything. Someone dashes into an angry sea to rescue someone who is in distress in the water, maybe they succeed and maybe they don't. But they have taken an enormous risk of their own life – that's heroism.

In the gospel today, Jesus at this point of his life, is trundling along quite nicely - He is very popular, He is giving teaching that a lot of people were enjoying, He's fed people by the thousands, He's going really well. And all is good or so it seems. And people are talking about Him, so much so that He is talking to his apostles and asked the tremendous question – not just for them, but to us – “Who do you say I am?”

And that question has resonated down for the last 2000 over years – for each of us to recognise that it is a question that each of us has got to answer. Often, we come up with is as Jesus as a role model. Jesus as a teacher. Jesus as a great example. All of those things are valuable, all of them are important but they are not the true

picture. Because today is the day, in which we focus on Jesus as a hero, in the real sense of the word. Because He says to Peter, and the apostles and to anyone else who is listening, “who am I?” John the Baptist, one of the prophets - “I am going to give my life for you.” “I am going to give everything that I have, for you.”

And Peter was the one who has picked it up because he said to Jesus “I believe you are the Christ, I believe you are the Saviour.” That is something he knows because of all the prophecies and so on, that it is going to cost and cost enormously. And Jesus of course knew what was down the track for Him. The fact was at the moment He was Top of the Pops, Flavour of the Month or whatever, that has nothing to do with it. He’s not carried away by that. And He knows that life for Him is more than just teaching and giving good examples, important as they are. He knows that the real stamp of what He is, and what He does and what He will be to people will be down the track, will be His giving of Himself. His sacrifice of His life, totally. That is of course, the core of the word ‘Saviour’ and “Redemption’ and all those other key words we used in recognition of Jesus.

But then, the question comes back to you and to me – “How do we see Jesus?” “Who do we say He is?” If Jesus were to ask us directly and He can through our own thought process, our own prayers, He says to you, He says to me, “Who do you say I am?” What is our answer? What is our REAL answer? What is the answer that is deep in here? Is it just teacher, mentor and good example? Or is it hero? Is it that we truly recognise what He has given for us and we recognise also the capacity of the human spirit, that we share with Him to be able to give, absolutely, selflessly.

If you can get a copy of the Herald Sun, have a look at that article or maybe find the article on the net, about Pilot Officer Les Knight. It is worth reading the Herald Sun article. It is well-researched. It is captivating reading. I often skimmed through the paper, but I saw this and I just kept reading and reading. It is a fascinating story of someone who grew up and lives just down the road from us. And it shows that people are capable of doing extraordinary things. With God’s grace and within the human spirit that we all have, so we are all capable of being heroes. Who knows when this is going to be asked of us? Maybe it will never be asked of us in that sense. But the capacity to give of ourselves til it hurts, and maybe til it hurts big time.

That is there for us. And if it hurts, well, that whole notion of heroism, is coming our way. Not just have everybody wear our number on their footy jumper, or buy the program at the concert or whatever, or sell a lot of cds or whatever, or downloads – heroism is made of self-giving. True heroism is made of total self-giving, or certainly putting everything that we have at risk.

Les Knight showed that he could do it. He just lived down the road. But across the other world, in Holland, he is being honoured by people who may be well in saying to themselves in their old age – people who are 75 years of age and older, but may be in that village at that time, “I am alive because of that Aussie man from Camberwell”. And they are right. He’s a true hero and he was no different from you. No different than the capacity that any of us have, to be able to give of ourselves to others.

So when we ask ourselves the question, “Who do I say Jesus is?” He’s our hero. Maybe we don’t always treat Him as the hero that He should be. Maybe if we can start doing that, some of what is in Him could rub off on us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.