

Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 08.12.18

Over the last couple of years, I have discovered the extraordinary world of Netflix and Stan, for about \$10 a month. It's not bad, I don't get a great deal of time, but at least I can look up all sorts of things old and new, to see what's available. And it's not just for me of course, it's for anyone who wants to go down that path. One of the amazing things for someone as I did and some of you did who grew up in a time where if you wanted to see a movie, you'd go to a cinema, and you had to go at the particular time it was on and so on. Then television came in but you were still subject to the programmers. Now with Youtube, Stan and Netflix, we can look up films new and old and enjoy them. And often some of the old ones come up pretty well. And some of them can be pretty helpful in terms of understanding history, not just superheroes and whatever. When you think of superheroes you think of one actor who is no longer with us, but he got all the big roles. He played everybody who was anybody over a period of about 20 years and his name was Charlton Heston and he got the real major roles.

He was only a young man at the time when he played Moses in 'The Ten Commandments', (you wouldn't argue with him in that would you), parting the waters. Then a little later on in one of the most successful films of all time in Ben Hur, the first one which is much better than the one they did a couple of years ago. Later on, 'El Sid', a great Spanish warrior and enormously successful blockbuster movie of its time. Then a little later on he was Michelangelo in a film called 'The Agony and The Ecstasy'- same actor in all of these. Later on he was General George Gordon in 'Khartoum' playing a British officer even though he was an American himself. But one role which wasn't enormous in terms of it being the whole star, was in a film called 'The Greatest Story Ever Told', and he played John the Baptist. And if Charlton Heston playing John the Baptist called you to repent, believe you me you would repent, he didn't mess around. An enormously impressive character in those films there was a sense of a real character in the character, and of leadership, strength and courage.

Today we hear John describing himself, quoting the prophet Isaiah as a voice crying in the wilderness. It's one of those many phrases that have come into our language and daily usage of how we speak to one another. It's a bit like when

someone does something good for another, particularly a stranger, we'll talk about how they are a good Samaritan. There are so many biblical phrases and words, and a lot of people who don't read the Bible have no idea where they came from. But the voice crying in the wilderness goes right back into the Old Testament, but it was because John took that up and quoted Isaiah and saying "I've got a job here, I am the voice in the wilderness" and indeed he was, proclaiming that Jesus was coming.

The way we use that phrase today is an interesting one because it's used particularly for people who are saying something that's important to them, maybe important to the community in which it's being said, but there's a sense of swimming upstream in the whole thing. What is being said is not popular. No one is listening, no one is taking any notice. And when we go down that path, as indeed any of us can at any time, we know we are a voice crying in the wilderness. It's a tough place to be, and we all go there from time to time. It doesn't have to be John the Baptist out in the desert. It could be a mum or dad who is looking at a lifestyle, an attitude, a habit of one of their children that they know is absolutely set for destruction, sadness and anger. And they tried desperately to haul them back from that cause, but no notice is taken. "What would you know about it mum/dad, it's not your world."

And a little later on of course, everything comes tumbling down. It might be someone in public life, say a political party who sees various laws being proposed, various policies put forward, that says this is not what this country, state or council should be on about. And we should be doing something better, we should be holding a better example to our community that we're meant to be serving, but instead we're giving into this or that because we're giving in to the first rule of politics, which is to get elected. And then when we've done that we'll obey the second rule which is to get re-elected. And that's what drives it, and yet for people of substance, conscious and integrity, the sense of how do I keep doing this? How do I keep going into a council chamber or party room, or the board of my company, or the tea room at work, and keep saying this isn't right?

And it doesn't have to just be at board level or governments or whatever. It can be the tea room at work, where an unsafe practice has been observed, and somebody says this isn't right, someone is going to get hurt. We keep taking

a short cut in all of this, someone is going to get hurt. Then get told not to worry about it. But a little later on the chickens come home to roost. It takes a lot of character for that to be done. Just this week, information has come about which indicates a voice that was crying in the wilderness a few weeks ago. And as a result, the job was lost, the person returned to where they came from, never to be heard of in this country again. But warning those around them, that what was being put forward was not on. That it should not be undertaken as part of a policy and action. They were dismissed and vilified and ridiculed. And years later it all comes home and the chickens are there again.

The voice crying in the wilderness. With the exception of the parent, those are the obvious ones. But that's also you, you can be in that circumstance. All of us can be, when we know what is right in the depths of our being. Where our conscious, and the principles by which we try to live, are saying this is the way we should be going, not that. But to speak out, the peer group thing, imagine the struggle for so many young people within the context of that enormously strong peer group pressure. Of saying if I speak up and say no, we're not going to do this, we're not going to drink or take drugs, and there's a sense of ridicule and pressure that can be exerted on a young person. And to even say anything, to say it's not right, talk about a voice crying in the wilderness, and the wilderness is very lonely and isolated. And they look around for someone to support them- young, old or in between. And it's a wilderness, and when it's a wilderness, there's no one else around. It's a tough place to be.

Here we have John the Baptist, giving us an example in the way in which he lived his life, in his strength, courage and character. Now you might say, yeah fine, but look what happened to him. It was off with his head, and it was. But here are we, 2000 years later, and he's a hero. He's such a hero that he gets played by Charlton Heston in the movies, and you've got to be good to have Charlton Heston play you. His integrity, courage and strength was vindicated in no uncertain terms. Some people listened to him, most didn't. Some people repented, most didn't. And just a couple of years later, Jesus, for whom He was- the herald, or the precursor, suffered a similar fate to himself in terms of execution.

It's a tough world out there, we all know that. And to try and uphold the principles of Christian love and faith is not an easy task. It's not the comforting world that it was maybe not all that long ago. To be a follower of Jesus, to speak of Jesus in a public arena is nowhere near as easy and as comfortable as it used to be. We've seen the assault even on Christmas itself. Certainly it's happened in the States and other countries, Christmas doesn't exist, it's the holiday season. Happy holidays. How do you say happy holidays for someone who's not going on holidays? This is the nonsense that's been there, and yet everyone is happy to take off 2-5 days in the name of Christmas. So it's picking up stream, it's a tough call. John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness, so also can you be, so also can I be. But we give it a go, we give it an effort, knowing that when we do that, when we stand up for what we believe in- particularly when what we believe in in the very depths of our being, consistent with the gospel of Jesus. Well then we have a security that is total security. We may be voices crying out into the wilderness at many times in our life. But John the Baptist is our real and true hero.