

## **Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 12.01.19**

Sometimes the most insignificant or superficially insignificant stories can really have an impact, capture our attention and have real meaning. On the front page today of the weekend Australian, there's a story about a little girl who loves ballet. Nothing extraordinary about that, I wouldn't think. The only thing that is a bit different about it is that she lives about an hour's drive out of Longreach, which is in western Queensland, which is a long way from just about anywhere. And while she has her normal academic lessons from the school of the air, on radio and so on, for ballet, how do you do that? How do you teach ballet over the radio? So she has to go into Longreach, more than an hour's drive away for her ballet lessons and she is just absolutely wrapped in that. Now north western Queensland has been in the grip of a drought for about six or seven years. It's parched, it's really strenuous in terms of her family.

Lucy Faggotter her name is, and the headline I think in the paper said, perhaps you could do a rain dance, which would have gone down really well indeed. But there are a couple of other pics of her on a very parched farm, in the wool shed and out in the paddock with her dog. Just a little girl who loves ballet. But the interesting part of the story was that her mum and dad who take her into the ballet lessons each week, maybe a couple of times I think the story said, they find that her sheer enthusiasm for the ballet and her lessons takes them also into a different place from being surrounded by parched land, sheep that haven't got enough pasture, all the financial and economic worries that that brings. Her enjoyment, her love of ballet classes, and ballet itself, she wants to be part of Queensland's ballet dance school and eventually she will be. But it takes them into a different place, a place of hope, a place of optimism, a place of beauty that can make all the difference.

I heard that story read on Vision Australia radio and then later on purchased a copy of the paper just to get a few more details. It occurred to me that on this weekend where we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of our Lord, one of the things which I will constantly mention to people over the years, has been to say 'Thank you', may be in person and certainly to God for the grace of our baptism, to belong to this church family, in and through our baptism. And that's something we can all do. The only problem is, that from one perspective, we're a bit like that family on the parched,

drought stricken farm - it's not much to look around at these days within the context of the whole church. Our church is a bit of a mess, it is chaotic. Over in the U.S. for example, we're talking in terms of almost schisms happening. People taking up so much strong camps, one and the other, so much so that who knows what the future might bring.

In terms of church attendance, in terms of value of the Eucharist, people valuing the sacraments and so on, it's a different story entirely from what it was just a couple of decades ago. Even this week, I looked and did a few calculations on the mass attendance within our own archdiocese and it's about a 120,000 and that's pretty good – it's an MCG full of people, and I guess it is. But 40 years ago in 1978, there were a quarter of a million people attending mass and the catholic population has nearly doubled in the four decades that have elapsed. It's an uphill climb and of course, so much goes back to the sense of, people will say, disillusionment, disappointment, in many cases, anger and outrage at a number of elements at the way in which the church presents itself and what has been done and may be what has not been done. And in particular, all of those elements that have revealed themselves over the past 20 years, in terms of the abuse of minors and children have damaged pretty well every family.

It would be few of you here now and a few listening to this on radio who would not have had people in your own life. Your own faith is strong enough to want you to be here, to want you to bring you to listen and yet within the context of family, how many people are saying, "Well, look this church is not what it should be, it's not true to itself, it's not doing its job, etc. etc." That's the drought that's around us, it's dry, it's arid, it's not producing its fruit. However, what about Lucy? What about Lucy and her ballet? What about the enjoyment, the sense of uplifting hope and strength and grace that go for her parents and may be for who knows, how many thousands of readers who saw that story in the weekend Australian, who thought 'Yeah, we might be surrounded by a lot of negativity, we might be surrounded by a lot of difficulty, we might be surrounded apparently by so much ugliness, but there's still a lot of beauty, there's still a lot of good, there's still the hope of the 9 year old Lucy for the world, not just in ballet, but in terms of our faith and who we are and the place of Jesus in our life.

And may be this weekend when we recall the baptism of Jesus and his emergence into public ministry, a public ministry which has been extended through the apostles and those who have followed them to bring us our faith, to give us something to believe in, to give us someone to believe in and to follow. May be we can ask ourselves, 'Where's the Lucy in my life?', because they're there. It might be an individual person, it might be a sense of movement or mission that we admire, in people who get on a plane and go overseas to some of the most deprived countries and work there in the name of Jesus, they're Lucys. It might be someone that's in St. Vincent de Paul, but even in our own local community, will go out and do all sorts of things for people in need, they're our Lucys. It might be someone in our own family who is someone clearly of faith and that might have been an inspiration for our faith.

We think back to them, they're our Lucy's and it's their sense of faith that we pick up. Amidst the drought and the immediately evident devastation that can be around us, but we say no, we're not going to lose hope, we're not going to lose the sense of our family. This is the family to which we belong and as in our own personal families, things can go wrong, of course they can, they can go terribly wrong and people can let us down in families. And we can make mistakes and they can make mistakes, but we're still family. Today we celebrate the sense of family, born in our baptism, belonging to that family of faith, that began for most of us, may be when we were very small and for others it's something we've picked up along the way, may be through the example and the support and care and love of some of those Lucys in our life. So sure, it might be an arid and very difficult terrain in which we try and live out our faith, not just in our wider community but may be even within our family.

But there are Lucys, there are Lucys in our life who demonstrate to us the joy and grace of living within the context of faith. Let's think about those people who give us a sense of hope, of joy, of peace, of purpose. They're a gift to us and may be on this day on which we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, we can also celebrate our own baptism in our own church, with all its faults and failings and misgivings and disillusionment, but even still with much love, with much grace, with much help and with a sense of real closeness, to God. Let's find and pray for and be grateful for the Lucys in our life.

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