

Fr Kevin Dillon - HOMILY DATED 26.01.2019

I think it was back in the early eighties or thereabouts that the prediction was made that pretty soon we would be living in a paperless society. While that is accurate in some areas - people who produce Melways and the White Pages are probably not doing all that well in terms of their printed material - the reality is that we seem to go through printed paper and endless reams of paper, nevertheless.

I must admit that it doesn't bother me as there seems something very valuable about the paper record of what we do and what we write and whether that is maintained electronically is another story. How many times have you gone back to your phone to look for that message from last week and you've accidentally deleted it or it's gone into cyber space or wherever and it had information that you had to have? A little paper, even a scrap of paper would have done the trick.

The whole notion of what we write down is important. The Gospel that I have just read comprises the first four verses of that introduction, as I mentioned by St Luke, to his Gospel. It's probably not seen as the most inspirational part of scripture that there is, just a little prologue, an introduction. He's writing this down for a special person – who he gave the nickname Theophilus (someone who loves God). But in fact, those four verses and what underpins them, that he is providing an ordered account of the life of Jesus, is something that we should be very grateful for.

What if St Luke had decided to just have a chat with Theophilus? What if he'd said, 'No I won't write it down, just sit down and I'll tell you a story.' Would the story have been maintained? Would it have been changed or altered? Somehow or other it reached a written form. And the important thing is for us to look at the value of actually writing something down. I say that at a time when I admit that my handwriting was not all that great, and I admit today that it's a lot worse as I don't do handwriting all that much.

But I do commit a lot of things to paper and there is a permanent record, and it's ease of access. Above all what we write down can be something that gives a real sense of interior awareness, that texts and little messages and let alone, things like Instagram and Tweets, about which I know nothing and that will remain, can't do in the same way.

Maybe this weekend as we look at Luke's Gospel, verses that seem totally unimportant – and yet they are there. Why are they there? Well, maybe they are there to remind us of the value of what we write down.

When I moved here in July 2017 I had to go through a lot of stuff. Some got turfed and some didn't. Maybe especially though it's the written things and the objects, the cards that people have written to us, the cards people sent to me when my mum died and when my dad died. People who wrote things in them that gave me a lift then and they still give me a lift now. How can I throw those out? When you pick these up and read them they have just as much effect now as they did then. They have just as much power as they ever had. It's the power and the value of the written word.

I think of a letter I wrote to my father that I discovered after he died. It was written on his eighty fourth birthday just three months before he died and I had a fair idea that he wouldn't see eighty five so I thought, well here's a chance in a single page to say thank you, to tell him much I loved him, how much I admired him and how grateful I was to him. I kept a copy myself, but I found the original – what I gave to him - after he had died.

And I'm sure that's a not uncommon experience - that we go through things that have been left to us – maybe by a parent, and in some very sad cases, a child. And we ask ourselves why did they keep that? What did that mean to them? How much did that touch their heart and really give an important message to them?

Just before coming down to the church I picked out of my bookshelf this little book. I found it a few days after my first parish priest, Fr Dan Cokely, down at East Benteigh, died on the 18 July 1973. He was, what I considered, quite old at 54. I was just a brash young assistant priest of about 27 or 28 at the time. But I found this little notebook and it's a notebook that contained his retreat notes, and that meant an enormous amount to me to see what he wrote. He didn't write them for me, but I got a couple of mentions along the way, which was nice

Very importantly though, I found this piece of paper. He was a list person, like I am and he wrote down – Wednesday, write to the bank manager regarding the church. How many parish priests have written that one down? Ask re: para liturgy, Wednesday seven thirty p.m. Write up Census.

He never got to do any of those things. I found him dead in his bed at eight o'clock that morning. I've always kept that. As a list person it just reminds us about what they say – that God gets a laugh when he sees our diaries, and looks at our plans. But these were things committed to paper and here I am with it nearly fifty years later. It is a source of inspiration to me, and by extension to you because you've been down this track, you've got things that are precious to you – cards and letters that you have hung on to, maybe through four or five house moves. These are the

messages of God by the messengers from God and they are there in our hands reminding us of all the things that are important in life, and the things that aren't.

A few years ago, a couple of parishioners asked me to tell them about this book, titled *Three Hundred and Sixty Five Thankyous*. It's the story of a fellow who had a bit of a reckoning in his life and when he looked back he realised how many people had helped him along the way. Some had been there his whole life and some had been there at important points giving him the milk of human kindness. He decided the following year he was going to write every day to one person who had been important in his life. And he did. It wasn't a leap year and so there were three hundred and sixty five of them.

I mention it as we begin this year of 2019, to suggest that we could do far worse than to take on board something like that. You might think, I can't do three hundred and sixty five. Well, it might be for the month of February – so twenty eight thank you notes. Or, it could be something we did during lent – so forty. It doesn't matter what the number or frequency is, but the value of us committing in writing to people who have been good to us, people who have cared for us, people who have got us out of a spot when we have got into one. It might have been yesterday, or it might have been years ago.

The written word, as St Luke knew, was something of enormous value. Luke's Gospel was probably spoken many times as he told the different stories that came through St Paul and further over. The fact that he committed them in some form by which they could be handed down from one year, one century, one millennium to the next, is something that every time we pick up a Bible and listen to the stories of Jesus we can be grateful not only to the writer for, but to the written word itself.

We can take on board the value of what happens when we somehow put something on to paper and make some sort of record of it and put it in the hands of people we value – something that they can treasure, just as we ourselves have treasures because of what others have given to us.