

Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 03.02.19

The reality is, wherever we go and whatever we do, there are cameras everywhere. And they're in handbags and in pockets and on belts and whatever. The result of that is any number of events, welcome or not so welcome, are recorded and who knows, they're shot all over the world and into the television stations. Over the years though until this phenomenon of everyone having a phone these days with pretty high resolution camera with it, the work of photographers was a fairly specialised work, not just a camera out the backyard on First Communion day or those sorts of things or Christmas time with the party hats.

There were people who would go into particularly dangerous situations: war correspondents, war photographers and so on. But as newspapers developed, photographers took more and more risk and went into all sorts of dangerous situations in order to be able to get the news out not just in words, but in pictures, sometimes very graphically indeed. Over the time it's been quite extraordinary how those who are enthusiastic, amateur photographers still can pick up extraordinary shots or footage if it's video, of immensely dangerous situations. I came across this a couple of years ago and made a note of how I found the story of Cillian and Robin Fitzpatrick. I mention that clearly so that you can have a look at this article that's on the net because it's well worth reading and in some ways quite inspiring. They are an ordinary senior couple who were in Marysville in their home on the 7th of February 2009. Their home was destroyed and they survived. It's quite a lengthy article with extraordinary photos that Cillian took.

Take the clock back 10 years and this was their home. Cillian had interestingly enough just that morning (Saturday) decided to take some photos. They were putting in new carpet and doing a few renovations to the home so he went down there and took a number of photos of the home with no idea whatsoever that their home would not be there on Sunday February the 8th. You could do far worse this week than to just look at that article and go through it and recognise that it's just an ordinary couple, grandparents. Him with his photography, her with her sense of pride in their simple home, and this is what happened 10 years ago. But within it all, there was one thing that really impressed me as I read the article. "During the course of the fire they write, we had done all the usual things. Wet tea towels tied around the nose and mouth. Bath towels soaked and put on the floor

to prevent smoke coming in through the doors. May as well put the good towels to use, two lives are worth more than two towels. Towels on the cat's basket too.

Now we were lying on the floor in the study trying to get the best air we could, wondering what next? Taking each breath was difficult and painful. How much more could we cope with? Thankfully, we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know He keeps His precious promises. Therefore we knew that our best option was to ask Him for help, and what to do next. And our prayer was "Dear Lord, if you want to take us home today, please do so quickly, Cillian isn't one for pain. Lord if you have further work for us to do here, then it's up to you to get us out safely. In our own strength, we cannot make it." Whatever was to be, we wanted it to be according to God's will and purpose. We were down to our last breaths and minutes if we had not left straight away.

We could see lots of flames outside the front glass door now. Little choice left. We sensed that God was telling us to go. We anticipated breathing our last when we opened the front door, as the garage and trees and everything else, was enveloped with heat. We expected the flames to rush inside the house as we ventured outside. What a site was coming." And so it goes on, and as I said you can do far worse than to research that whole article. It is riveting reading but what particularly took me was that I wasn't expecting when I first began to read the article, was the enormous sense of faith and trust and dedication to God shown by this couple in their courage, and with Cillian still snapping away with his camera for goodness sake. And you look at some of those photos, not the ones in the aftermath. But to have the courage, presence of mind, foolishness who knows, to take pictures when they're in this unbelievable inferno that has gone down as the greatest disaster that Australia has ever seen. And here we are 10 years down the track.

All of these things are important to us because as it so happens we've got a gospel today which tells us about Jesus being in front of people who did not realise they were seeing Him. These sort of incidents and please God there won't be a repeat of them this weekend or any other weekend, but one day there will be. These sorts of incidents come about from time to time despite the tragedy, pain, loss and trauma that goes on. And it's on so many levels; it's not just the loss of life, loss of pets and memories and so on, it's the loss of businesses which meant employment for so many people. Some people from that Black Saturday fire never got back their job. Couldn't pay their mortgage, had to sell their house. Their house wasn't touched

by the fire, but the business where they worked was no longer operational, and they couldn't get another job. And so the effect can roll on and on.

How do we see, how can we recognise the face of Jesus in such events. Not an easy task and yet as Cillian and Robin speak in the article, in the people who understood words such as we heard in the second reading. Love is patient and kind and gentle and generous. These are the things that they experienced magnificently, and it helped them with their faith to be able to hang on to what was important and treasured by them. I read a story around the same time of a student at Whittlesea Secondary College. She was about 13 or 14, and while the fire was bearing down on her home, she texted her best friend at school and said goodbye and told her how much she loved her. She died in the fire. A reminder to us that sometimes we get the opportunity to say those sorts of things, we don't have to have a fire bearing down on us that's going to take our life. We have that opportunity every day to tell other people how much they mean to us. To give them encouragement, maybe to forgive them. Maybe to ask their forgiveness, to say the things we really need to say.

These are the lessons that come out of Black Saturday. Whether it's on the day, 10 years later or 50 years later, doesn't matter, the lessons are there. They're extraordinary lessons, to be able to find the face, the will and the goodness of God within even the most awful events that befall us. Over the next week or so, we'll be able to see many programs and read many articles which 10 years down the track will tell us some of those stories, and there are many of them. Read them. Watch them. Reflect on them. Pray about them. They're extraordinary messages, from God, that help us to get the very best out of what we are, and who we are 10 years further on. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.