

Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 26.05.2019

One of my favourite television shows from years ago which I occasionally quote from was called 'Hills Street Blues'. It was a Police drama that went over about 6-8 seasons or thereabouts and it was one of the first of the series that blended several storylines together. Each of the episodes would begin with what they called the roll call. All the police would be gathered around and be told about what had happened over night, some of the jobs they've got to do, people they've got to see and so on. And the old Sergeant as they used to break off and go through the door he'd say "Hey, hey! Stop!" They would all turn around, and he would hold his finger up and say "Let's be careful out there." It's a great line and was a signature part of a really very fine television show.

"Let's be careful out there" It applies to all of us – certainly in society and maybe especially out on the road. A lot of expression of concern has been heard in the last couple of weeks about the extraordinary rise in the road toll this year. I think it's in excess of 50% over from where it was this time last year. Many of the fatalities that have been suffered have been in regional areas and an excessive amount are with motor cyclists. The reality is that it's something that affects each and every one of us in some shape or form because we're all out on the roads and we're all having to travel from here or there.

As we look at those statistics, there is one element which is of increasing alarm and concern and that is that the last year for example, in 2018, in excess of 40% of people who died on the roads were found to have some sort of illicit drugs within their system. Over 40%. A year or two ago there was a wide spread drug test on the roads in Tasmania, and it returned the staggering statistic that 52% of those people who were tested for drugs, the result was positive. What is that saying - not just about our roads – that's bad enough. But what is it saying about our whole society? The whole element of drug usage has become almost so commonplace or passe that nobody even worries about it all that much. But we would worry about it if the surgeon standing over us with a scalpel or a drill had been on some of the 'funny stuff' a few hours before. We would worry if the taxi driver whose taxi we were getting into had done drugs similarly not that long ago and these are really the things that ought to concern us all. But of even broader concern, as the professor used to say – Why is this so? Why is it that so many people - not just the down and out - but so many people in an otherwise a sophisticated society - so they think - are turning to all manner of drugs.

I know over the years in Parish work I've had to deal with any number of different situations from consoling family members who have been robbed by their own siblings or children because the quest for more money to purchase drugs has been something which has been done over. "Can I

borrow your car grandma?" It happened once and the car came back in such a terrible state that it could not even be used again. And that was just sheer drug usage and so on. Things have been burgled and stolen and broken into. The scariest night of my life was with someone who was high on ice at the time and I wasn't quite sure if I was going to survive that. It was a few years ago, but I'll never forget it. And so it goes on that we look at all this and we say "Why are people doing this?". Now go back fifty years or so to the era of The Beatles and "Hey man. If you're going to San Francisco be sure to wear some flowers in your hair" or whatever. It was all peaceful and loving and we loved the world and so on. Well it didn't stay like that for too long, did it? And it's got very destructive and we still haven't really come to terms with that. Because it's the question - Why? Why is this happening? And interestingly enough the old hippies from late 60s and early 70s would be going around saying "Hey, peace man!" And in a way, they were right. What they were looking for was peace. Somehow within the turmoil within the society in which we live, they were finding peace very elusive. But if they took a tablet or snorted something or smoked something or injected something, it was all going to go away, at least for a time. And it seemed pretty good, because they found what they thought was peace.

Jesus talks about peace in the gospel today, and it's a different kind of peace. He said "I give you a peace that the world cannot give." It's a gospel passage which encourages us as we live in a society which is fighting a totally losing battle in terms of legislation and policing or whatever with the whole scourge of drug addiction. It gives us a different element to it but strangely enough as people have turned their backs on the whole faith side of life, so too has drug addiction gone up. Is there a relationship between the two? Arguably, yeah a very strong one. Because it's in the whole element of faith, particularly within the context of Christian faith where Jesus promises us a peace the world cannot give that we find the capacity to get an inner peace. Notwithstanding the turmoil we might have through trauma, or illness, or job loss or family relationship breakups or whatever.

Over the years so many people have said to me, and perhaps they will have said to you, or maybe it's you who have said it "I don't know how I would have got through this or that - whatever this or that might have been - without my faith" There was a story a while back which really took my attention. It was a story of a priest who was called to visit someone who was very sick. One of the family members had said could you go and anoint him? The priest went to see him unannounced - he'd only been in the parish a short time. When he got there, the son or daughter let him in. When he got there, there was a chair beside the bed facing the elderly man in the bed who was looking very sick and was very sick. The priest who had never met the gentlemen before asked "Oh were you expecting me?" - Nodding at the chair. The man sort of laughed as much as he could and said "Well no disrespect, but no I didn't know you were coming" And the priest asked "Well do you get a lot of visitors?" The old man said "No, not many" The priest asked again "Have

you had someone here?" - "No" - Well who's the chair for?" The old man replied "Well you can use it now. But years ago I spoke to the priest who was here before you and I told him I wasn't much good at prayer. And he said to me 'Well when you want to pray' –and I can tell you I've never wanted to pray as much as I do now, when I'm coming to the end of my life – 'it's not very complicated. When you want to pray just put a chair opposite your own and just work on the fact that Jesus is with you in your presence in that chair. Just talk to him, that's all its about. It's not about combing through a book, or getting on your knees or joining your hands. Just talk to Jesus.' He said I tried it, and it works". Down through the ages people have found – not necessarily that approach - that whole understanding of just talking to the Lord makes all the difference. The cynics will look at it and say "It's no different than a little kid with an Imaginary friend" Oh yes, it is. It's a lot different. That sense of closeness, connection and love of Jesus Christ is a core part of who we are as human beings. It's through that, where we can find and treasure a true inner peace that Jesus promises. A peace that the world cannot give.

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