

## Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 02.06.2019

I must admit that I found the Feast of Ascension somewhat a tricky, even challenging, to which to find the right thing to say because as most of you will know, I'm no theologian and I'm never quite sure how to answer when kids say "Jesus rose up and He went up and up and up, when did He have to put on his space helmet?" And I have been asked that question a few times. Kids know what they are doing.

But I came across this quote some years ago, from a Dominican theologian which said it pretty well and he talks about the essential teaching of scripture is that "*Christ through His resurrection and ascension, has departed from the present world corrupted by sin and destined for destruction, in order to enter a new world. Much more real than our present world because it alone presents true life. However, it is vain to seek where it is, just as it is wrong to imagine as this far away. The new world where Christ awaits us, is not far from us. It is not outside our world. It transcends it. It is of another order. And we have access to it by faith and the sacraments. In a contact that is mysterious, but more real and close than any of our contacts with this world can be.*"

I suppose I have to read that a few times - once will be enough for now - to really get the meaning of it. But in a simple way for many, it just says yeah this life is so limited and we have access through our faith to something far greater.

This ascension was a peak moment in the life of Jesus. It was His parting gift in so many ways. The whole experience that we all have of peak moments, that it can take on a meaning that would really allow God to enter into our life, in a similar way of that reflection on the Feast of Ascension says.

For obvious reasons, fifty years down the track, I have been thinking of peak moments and there have been a few of them and obviously what happened to me and for me, fifty years ago this weekend was incredibly humbling and yet energising, not just ritual but a commissioning to be ordained as a priest – it has been a long journey, eight years of study but a thought went on even before that began. But from that one peak moment, all those years ago, there were so many ways in which that other life of God in our life has demonstrated itself in the context of my life as a

priest. I want to mention just three of them to you. Not because it is about me, but at the end of it, I want you to think of as if you were here talking about the peak moments in YOUR life, that God has entered in, in some special, amazing, wondrous and yet often very down-to-earth way, what would that be? That's your homework for the weekend.

I have done my homework and I could probably pick many examples but given the weekend being what it is, these are three that stood out, I guess.

One – I was appointed to St Peter's in East Bentleigh in January 1970. I reckon I've been there for about two to three weeks when this happened. In those days, priests were able to and did a lot of those basic home visitations. That afternoon I decided to go knock on doors and say, here I am, say good day and meet people in the parish. I spoke to the Parish Secretary, her name was Marie Morcom, and I just happened to say to her "I'm just taking the car and going down your street today." It was Blamey Street in East Bentleigh and that chance remark was important because after two or three visits, I found myself in a home with a mum and a dad and two, fairly significant, disabled young boys – one was about fourteen and the other was about sixteen or seventeen. These wonderful mum and dad in the half hour or so I was there, that these people were amazing what they are doing.

Whilst I was with them, there was a knock on the door – it was Marie, the parish secretary. Now these were the days before mobile phones. And she said, "I just had a call – Brian Cooney, was a young Year 7 boy at the Salesian College at Chadstone. He's been knocked off his bike, taken by ambulance to the Alfred Hospital and he was not expected to live. Is it possible for you to go and see him?"

Now, the only reason Marie knew I was in that street was because I somehow said I was going to be in your street, so she cruised up and down Blamey Street until she saw my car and worked out where I was. So off I went to the Alfred Hospital to see this young fellow who was from this wonderful Irish family - he was Australian born but mum and dad were from Ireland - and he has suffered some terrible injuries. And this was in the parish, or altogether, my first anointing of anyone, let alone in such dire circumstances.

What a way to start off, and he was not expected to live – I spoke to one of the doctors, who was not much older than I was, and I told him that is the first anointing I'd done and he said, "well, you got a doozy here, and he's not going to see the end of the day."

Well, I'm here to tell you, that he did! He not only with God's grace came good, but he's gone on to live, it took probably six months of rehabilitation in those days, six months to even get him to get back to school, but he's gone to live a complete and full normal life.

But the other interesting or fascinating factor was those two young boys, who have not received the sacraments to that date because they have been told beforehand (but not by a priest in the East Bentleigh parish) because of their disability, they shouldn't receive Holy Communion. Well, they were more worthy to receive Holy Communion than any of us here. So all of that here, was just a pathway of God's grace. And I reckon I was two weeks into the parish, and had that experience.

On a different level, not so much the sacrament or the healing, but back about, I think it was 1998, in St John's in Mitcham, one of our Grade 5 or Grade 5 to Grade 6 student, in St James school in Vermont, a little girl by the name of Laura Bakker and Laura contracted cancer, battled it valiantly for about eighteen months, and I got to know her and her family very well, would constantly go to their home, the eucharist was particularly important to her – just as an eleven year old. It was really very valuable to her. So we got to know each other pretty well over that time, I constantly took her communion when she was not well to go to mass or to be at school.

Anyhow on January, I could remember it was Australia Day, tennis was on and it was a terrible storm in Melbourne, I think it was 1997-98 thereabouts. I went to see her for what I knew would be the last visit. She was gravely ill, could hardly speak but when it came to the prayers, she was too ill to receive Holy Communion but I was able to anoint her and say the prayers. At the end of the prayers, I'll never forget this, how could you, but somehow or other, she put her arms behind her, lifted herself up from the bed, and gave me the most memorable hug I've ever received. About three hours later, she died.

And if that is not something that tells you that what you are providing is worthwhile, I don't know what is. And these are the extraordinary privileges that every priest has to be part of these intimate moments of people's lives. Talking to the kids who were here yesterday, noting a similar experience with a very sick child, as they turned life support off. Somehow or other, as strangers, we can be invited into these situations.

I remember often at Geelong, phone will go in the middle of the night and I have to see someone who only had a short time to live and the family has asked for the priest to come and so on. I tell you what, I'm not much good at 2am in the morning. Just got to get up and put the shoes and socks on and feeling a bit grumpy or whatever. But you get to the hospital and then you say, hey, this is why I'm here. This is what this is all about. The only problem is I would come back, absolutely wide awake. Because this is a message from the Lord Himself to say, if you ever forget why you are here, this is it. And those kind of things were very common place indeed.

I suppose the third peak moment I have yet to mention happened in July 2008. And it propelled me into a whole new dimension of my calling as a priest. I woke up and heard a comment that had been attributed to a senior member of the church pertinent to the whole abuse crisis which was beginning to emerge yet again. I remember even in my bleary 6AM foggy mind thinking "goodness gracious". It's been when will I ever get it. A couple of hours later, Neil Mitchell gone on to the topic and I was mad as a meat axe. Goodness gracious.

So without thinking, rush of blood to the head as we do, picked up the phone, dialled 3AW, knew their phone number off by heart by then, and I think those days it was 96961278. I said "I'm a priest and I would like to talk to Neil". And they thought "Oh beauty, this would be good" thinking I was going to defend what was indefensible. And in the way, when I heard the interview back, I've got a cd recording of it actually, someone got it for me – I was mentioned, and I made no secret that this was an area of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and indeed well before – that the church was not and had not handle it in any way as it should. And eleven years on from that, not quite sure if we have advanced all that far. But in that phone call, I remember standing with the phone in my hand, waiting for me to come on air, it was only about a couple of minutes – I was thinking – do I or do I not identify who I am. Well I thought, if I don't, I

could be Snowy on the tram, and if I do, it is going to be interesting what happens from thereon. But I did and it was the best thing I ever did.

A whole area of engagement and ministry and engagement with the ministry too, people I've heard from about ten of them today, by phone or text, who are just marvellous people who have been hurt so much and who are still hurting. But for me it was dear and it rang as a peak moment.

So they are my three. I suppose if I really thought about it, I could think of thirty-three and maybe more. But the real point of this is not me. The real point of this is – where has God touched you on the shoulder, tapped you on the head, slapped you on the back or maybe even kicked you a little bit further down? And said, wake up to yourself. Where have been the peak moments where that transcendence to whatever is beyond this life, has touched you? They are there, they are absolutely there.

And as we pray this mass together, the whole connection that we have, with God and His loving goodness in our lives, is so important. The Ascension was that peak moment in the life of Jesus and indeed of those who witnessed it. But for us, it is an entrée, a channel, to reflect on how God touched us all, and the lives of all of us in extraordinary, meaningful ways but often very simple ways. Often it is just about how things fit together. It's providence. It's maybe a chance remark, that in my case, it enabled someone to find where I was so I could get to the Alfred Hospital. It can be that beautiful, memorable gesture of a dying little girl that I will never forget. It can be the sense of something has got to happened here, I've got to do something about this. Can be any of those things and a hundred more.

Let's be grateful for our loving God, let's be grateful for those peak moments that come into our lives, let's ask with God's grace that we can use them in the way in which he chooses.

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