

## Fr KEVIN'S HOMILY DATED 09.06.19

I guess I've been doing a fair bit of looking back at life over the past week or so and one area of course relevant to priesthood and being a priest has been the eight years of study that preceded ordination and many times people have said to me, 'Well how well did that seminary course equip you for what you found in parishes?' and notwithstanding, I suppose some areas of inadequacy and so on, overall probably better than I might have thought at the time when I was studying things that I thought would be of no relevance. That said, one of the most formative and helpful parts of those eight years was four sets of holidays when I worked for 8-10 weeks at St. Vincent's hospital as an orderly. Now that was a very worthwhile experience from many perspectives, one of which was, that it was right down at the bottom of the picking order. Orderlies were not quite neurosurgeons, nor treated accordingly; we just pushed people around in wheelchairs and so on.

And for three of those years though I was in the, what was then called 'Casualty' or 'Emergency', we call it today 'Ward' and people would come in, in all sorts of terrible states of difficulty and so on and fortunately, I got used to, and this was helpful, being able to answer a question that I have continued to be asked for all these years, particularly when I go to a hospital or even to a private home when someone is sick, especially following surgery. It's a question I would have dreaded, had I not had that experience. And it's a question, which from time to time you may dread as well, when you are asked, as I often am, "Would you like to see my operation?" And most people are saying, 'Not on your life!', and the bed clothes are drawn back, or this that or the other and there's gaping wounds and stitches and who knows what is forthcoming and unless you've had a bit of training and unless you're used to it, you can look at your own, but it's not easy to look at anybody else's, but the reality is that's a, I reckon that's all the times in hospitals, the most common question I've been asked.

Had it not been for that time in St. V's, I would have been running for the door I'm sure or collapsing on the floor many times, because, sometimes it was not long after the surgery had been performed in emergency at St. Vincent's as an orderly, it was before it was performed and it was very necessary indeed. It's a strange thing I guess about scars. Scars are something which people do like to sort of show off. That's why I went back to that gospel today because Jesus showed the apostles his

scars. He didn't say "Do you want to see my operation?", but he did say "I want you to see the wounds that I have suffered?", and not in a sense of 'Look what you did to me', but he did it in order to say to them 'I want you to know how much I love you, what I have given for you' and the message got through loud and clear. He did it a couple of times of course, in the Supper room after the resurrection as well, particularly when Thomas was there.

So showing the scars and in the case of Jesus, they were scars of sacrifice, of suffering and importantly of survival. What is it within us that makes us want to show others our scars? So we love showing our scars, Jesus did it, because of survival. We say 'This happened to me and somehow or other, I got through it, it was painful,

I suffered, I wish it hadn't happened, but I'm through it and I'll be okay into the future'. And that's what Jesus is doing in this marvelous scene that is put before us on this day – Pentecost Sunday, the feast of the Church, of the coming of the Spirit to enliven and motivate and fulfil the Church in its mission. We might say 'Where is the Spirit today?' and that might be a difficult question to answer. I'm sure we could come up with all the superficial answers, but when we look at our Church today, when you look within the context of the Church that you experience in your family, in people who no longer care, no longer bother and worst of all, no longer believe. And they're there in every family and it's heartbreaking, and the Church is, while on the surface, everything looks terrific, we are a Church with some gaping wounds, some of them very much of our own making, others inflicted upon us. But gaping wounds can be healed, gaping wounds can be stitched and over time things can and do get better. But it's in that suffering that we learn so much. It's often said that if you go to hospital, leave your inhibitions behind. Doesn't matter who you are, what you've accomplished, how much people might bounce great to you in other circumstances of life, when you go to hospital, you're just another patient; doesn't matter if it's a single room or a four bed ward, you're just as crook as the person in the next bed whether it's a separate room or not, the whole notion of suffering and particularly of scarring, because scarring is a sign that we have got through somehow or other.

And this is what we need to take on board, may be at the moment, because we're not really a church that we would like to be, we're not really the Church that we were. I heard a radio ad during the week, I won't mention it exactly, but it's for a Catholic

organisation that was doing a commercial radio broadcast, a commercial advertising their particular service. And they advertise the letters only. Now I won't say what it is, I don't want to have it in for them, but it was interesting. Let's say it's ABCD, and the C stands for Catholic, but at no stage does it tell you, it's Catholic, it's ABCD, whatever that means. You go to the website - ABCD, you go through just about all of the references to ABCD and the word Catholic does not appear.

Now that's the reality and I thought, I'm disappointed and I'll probably write to the people in charge and say "Look, the only way you get over hurt, the only way you get over embarrassment, the only way you get over shame and gaping wounds, is to acknowledge it and fix it, not necessarily to be proud but to say 'Yep, we've messed up, we've done some terrible things and this is not only in the area of abuse and so on, but other things as well. But we are still a church with a Spirit and the Spirit is telling us to be aware of our scars and may be just as we can with physical scars, not to hide them, we don't have to boast about them, like Quinton Hooper were doing in the scene from Jaws, but we acknowledge them, we live with them. Another great film from a few years ago was called simply 'The Doctor', and it was about a surgeon, a heart surgeon, who contracts cancer, and a healer is now the patient. It's a fascinating film, because he's on the other side.

And he has to be a patient, where before he's been the rather gung ho surgeon with the rock music playing in the operating theater and so on. And he learns the fear, he learns the sadness, he gets to know other patients in waiting rooms where he's there for ages and ages, he learns what it's like to be sick. And it makes him, and the story moves on, such a better doctor. And at the very end he's training, he gets through his cancer and he's training some new students in Medicine and he trains them far differently from what he did before, because he gets them to be very much aware of what it's like to be sick, what it's like to be hurting, what it's like to be wounded, what it's like to have scars. So, we're scarred, may be we're scared, just one letter less. We're scared and scarred because our church is not as it was, but Jesus is not afraid to show his scars.

That was the source of strength, the source of healing. I must say I'll be very pleased if one day that organisation tells us what church they belong to, not in pride, but in the sense of humble honesty – this is who we are and if you want to utilize our service, well, that's who we are and we've messed up in some ways but we'll be doing our best. The open acknowledgment is there within our church. Let's hope

that's the Spirit who's coming upon the apostles is celebrated on this day, that the Spirit is able to inflame our Church, not necessarily immediately, with the sort of vitality that is still within living memory of some of us, but with a sense of humility, honesty and openness and to acknowledge the scarring that is a part of the lives of us all.

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