

Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 21.07.19

You may be aware of Dr. Michael Carr-Gregg who is a child and adolescent psychologist, in fact he had a couple of lectures that were well attended at the Uniting Church just around the corner and they were very well attended indeed- I think it was on building resilience in children. He heads up an organisation called the Family Peace Foundation, and in recent months, the last 3 or 4 months, they've had a series of radio commercials on family peace. To talk about situations that children have to manage where Mum and Dad are drinking or gambling or arguing, and it finishes with the line 'family peace- do it for your kids'. And they've gone over very well with some people and not so well with others. There's been a number of complaints that have come in on the radio saying "we don't need that' etc etc. And one point was made which was interesting. One of the major problems that we have as parents was the disharmony not between myself and my husband, but between the kids. If they were peaceful with one another, the home would be a lot more harmonious.

So there's all sorts of different sides. The ads themselves irritated some people just through what they were doing. But at the same time I felt there was something worthwhile in focusing the importance of family harmony. Because there's a lot of it around in some cases, and a lot of disharmony around in others. And family peace is one of the more difficult things for us to try and discover. And it goes back a long way- Cain and Abel for goodness sake, going right back to the beginning. And any number of areas of historic family and sibling rivalry that there has been over the years, and even some of the siblings who made it big in music in relatively recent times, had fallouts and the group fell apart. The Everley Brothers and Creedence Clearwater Revival were some of the ones I suppose from my generation where the key siblings who were part of the group and got it going together, had a falling out and the whole group sort of dissolved along the way.

That's been the case of course in any number of areas, of business. And we see the issues in so many different families, even in the most successful businesses and families, and sometimes those rivalries and almost enmities which come to the surface become headline news and the whole world is in on the court cases that come about and the law suits and everything else. And we often say "I wonder what

Christmas dinner is like at that table?” And so it goes. But the whole area of family harmony is an important thing for all of us, and it’s something that’s really focussed on in here in this little story of Mary and Martha. Now I guess the whole notion of someone who does the praying and someone who does the work- that wouldn’t be the first time in history that that issue has emerged, and it won’t be the last. It’s there all the time, the sense of practicality. I imagine there would be more than a few of us who would listen to that story when it comes up every so often, and be more than a little sympathetic to Martha, who’s running around serving the afternoon tea and doing all the work, while Mary is just sitting down, listening.

And we listen to Jesus and His adjudication of the whole event and say what’s all this about. He’s saying Mary has chosen the better part. Martha seems to get a reprimand and it seems a bit tough, but in reality of course, it’s not always exactly what it seems. The issue emerges not because Martha was doing all the serving, but because she had a grizzle about it. They had this issue, and they brought their family disharmony into the presence of the Lord, and asked him to adjudicate maybe instead of saying “hey can we sort this out ourselves later on. Do we need to do it in front of our guest of honour?” It’s quite fascinating the way these things can emerge over the years. You and I would know of number of people for whom this is just another indication of a story that can emerge left, right, and centre.

And yet, while there can be bitterness, breakup, enmity even between siblings- somehow or other, the bond of family is still nonetheless enormously important. And it’s there when people get together at funerals, at weddings- maybe you’ve got to sit at a different table, maybe you’ve got to keep one away from the other. I’ve officiated at funerals where not only was there two families on opposite sides of the church. But I had one at a couple I think over the years where at the end of each side of the church, divided by the centre aisle, down the back, arms folded - a security guard. Dear oh dear, it can get very ugly indeed. So we listen to this story, and it prompts us to think well, ok how does it work in my family, how does it work for me? And the interesting thing is there are some people who don’t have siblings. Maybe they’re the only child, and they’ve spent years wishing they had a brother or a sister.

People who have siblings, maybe quite a few of them, who can't get away from quick enough and never make contact. We're interesting species, the human race. It's grass is always greener. But irrespective of what situation we're in, if we are in a situation where we do have siblings, or we just have family, how do we manage the disputes, the disagreements. How far does it go? What happens when sickness or misfortune, or even death, intervene. That's where this story can be very helpful to us to sort out what's really important in terms of who and what we are. One of the most fascinating and exhilarating stories that I've seen in recent years, it's a true story. It's a story of a Spanish family, just a few years ago. Their name is Belun. A mum and dad and their three boys.

They are a family featured in the 2015 movie from an extraordinary even that happened to them and to thousands of others in the Boxing Day tsunami. They were broken up in the tsunami, as it turned out they all survived. A movie called "The Impossible", it's not just a story of one person, it's a story of a family- broken up within the context of a disaster, not knowing if they were alive or dead. And gradually rediscovering one another. And the sense of absolute exhilaration where little by little they are unified, it's the sort of thing where if you saw it in a movie, and you didn't know it was real you'd say "no that couldn't have happened." In this terrible disaster where hundreds of thousands of people perished, how is it possible that this little family could somehow have all been reunited. But in particular the end of the movie shows the two youngest children, Simon and Thomas found each other. And they had been able to keep with one another. They had been separated from their older brother Lucas, and their mum and dad. So it's 2 and 2 and 1. The dad is on his own. And then this last very poignant, but beautiful scene. It brings them back together.

But amazingly, pretty well as it happened, right at the end of the movie. But in particular the two little kids, their reaction when they see their older brother, who they'd been looking for for days, not knowing where their mum is, their dad is, or their older brother. And there's the sense of utter excitement and disbelief. These are two little kids who probably fought like cat and dog and drove mum and dad crazy so much of the time. And yet the bond of love that was there for them and still is, it was quite extraordinary. The mother Maria truly thought she was going to die as a result of the injuries that she had sustained during the tsunami, this was nearly

a week later. And the reunion happened within a matter of a very brief time but somehow it all just came together.

Knowing that it's a true story of a real family, it really brings a new meaning to the whole question of "family peace, do it for your kids". And do it for yourself. Do it for ourselves. Mary and Martha is a timeless story, not just about who works and who prays, it's about what we mean to one another within the context of family. And to know and believe that it shouldn't take a tsunami, or anything like that, to make us truly appreciate one another. Mary and Martha and Lazarus, little family that cared for Jesus very much, and they for Him. They were a little family that really cared for each other. But they had blues like we all do. But nonetheless, when it was all said and done, they were truly a family. Hopefully the example of what we hear today, and what we're aware of deep in our hearts, can make sure that family life is a little closer. Maybe from this weekend, from the story of that gospel, to bring us just that little bit closer to one another.

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