

Fr KEVIN'S HOMILY DATED 04.08.19

Just for a moment mentally think of what you would write down if you were to have to compile a list of may be the, pick a number, any number, the 10 things that have the greatest potential to disrupt an otherwise harmonious and loving family and I guess, alcohol or drug abuse, marital infidelity, financial mismanagement, all of those would be high up the list. Somewhere though in the top 10 would be the very simple word, 'Will'. Now a few months back I think I asked you, to complete the old saying 'Where there's a will, there's a Most people said 'way', but of course the real answer is, where there's a will, there's a 'fight', and gee, how true that it is and over many many years, I've seen so many of the issues that arise out of Wills, that somehow a number of families that at least on the surface seem to be managing and getting along, and the Will comes and everything can go absolutely berserk.

I read this letter, extended letter, saw it in the paper a while back and it was so typical of what I've seen over the years, I kept it. But this is just once case that gives an example – My mother died a few years ago, my parents were legally separated and my father had been living abroad for some time. Shortly after my mother's death, he contacted me to say that since they had never formally divorced, he was entitled to a share of the family home. He told me to sell the house and arrange the proceeds to be split equally between him, my brother and myself. The deeds of the house were solely in my mother's name. My mother would have crawled out of the grave, rather than have him benefit from her estate. My solicitor confirmed that my father was entitled to nothing.

He wasn't happy about this and felt that my brother and I had stolen from him and so he's cut us both off from his own will, which I care nothing about, and from his life. Today I lost my mother, I also lost my father, all because of an inheritance. He said some really awful things to me about myself and about my mother and it really destroyed my grieving process. He called me a gold digger and said my mother had conned the family home from him. He told me he has no children and that we would never see him again. He said he'd rather die in agony than see me again, that I disgust him, I am his enemy. In response, I told him that I wished he was dead instead of my mother. It was not my finest moment. I'm so sad now that he won't be in my future, but I'm even sadder that the man who had always been my hero, my protector, has become a horrible, bitter man of whom I am ashamed.

I saw that in the paper and I cut it out and I cut it out because I thought, hmmm, this reflects so much of what I've experienced from time to time over the years and good families that have always got on and all of a sudden, this happens, and it doesn't have to be quite as dramatic as that, but the fights that go on and it's all within the context of loss and grief and bereavement and pain and long term illness and who did what and who did nothing, who supported and who didn't and who lives where and who doesn't and who's in this particular financial situation and a pickle and who isn't. Well, even in the gospel today, we get an interesting element of wills and inheritance because Jesus is called in to be the umpire and as I said in the bulletin this week, on another note, being an umpire is not really a very comfortable place to be for anyone particularly these days.

But the man says, 'Master tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance' and interestingly enough, Jesus backs off, Jesus says, 'I'm not your judge or the arbitrator of your claims, you need to sort it out yourself'. But then he talks about it in principle and he said watch out because greed can destroy you and indeed how easily it can and will. And it's my friend John Burns on breakfast program said some years ago and I often quote him, 'The deadliest of the 7 deadly sins is Greed', and how true that is and that's why this can creep in, particularly in the area of inheritance. It's so complicated because sometimes people have given up their job or moved house to look after mum and dad and so on, any number of different stories of why people have come in, the ends, someone will say, 'Ah, I lent mum and dad some money, now there's no record of it but I did'.

And how do you sort that one out and so it can go on and on. Ultimately though, one of the key elements that makes it so difficult is the fact that well it often happens because someone's died and that in itself is a reminder of something very important in sorting out the drama that sometimes, thankfully not always, but sometimes comes with issues of inheritance. It's the fact that we're reminded of our own mortality that might be this person today, it could be us tomorrow and that makes us nervous, and when we're nervous we often we react in a way that we wouldn't if we weren't nervous. We get scared about it all and it's a very difficult position in which to be. So the gospel today really challenges us to think of what real value are material possessions to us.

A little child once asked in a class 'Why is God invisible?' and the answer that the very wise teacher gave said 'Well, God is invisible because the best things in life are

invisible, like happiness, like peace of mind, like security, like love, like being loved. You can't go out and buy them but they're very very real and then when they're not there, they're absent indeed. In our mass today, we might be able to just give a little thought to possessions, material goods, we all need them, we all seek them to do a degree, but how much do we control that, and in particular, when it comes to what you might call the fruit of other people's works and labour, which is normally what's involved in the will, whether it's a house or a few trinkets, or memorabilia or whatever it is, it's usually because someone else has done the work, someone else has given the time, not always, but even Jesus himself found this a very difficult area in which to say, this is what's right and this is what's wrong.

So somehow or other, we've got to work our way through that in any family, not necessarily every family, sometimes it's pretty clear cut. But it does challenge our attitude to those material things in life, how much we seek them, how much we will allow them to be a dominant feature in our life, and in particular how much we may let that interfere with something which is truly precious in our life in terms of relationships with each other. There's no, as Jesus says, there's no clear answer to it, we need to sort it out ourselves, but we need to sort it out as best we can with a sense of what's important and what isn't important. Let's ask for the grace that in those areas of material goods and possessions, we can understand what matters and what doesn't.

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