

Fr Kevin Dillon - HOMILY DATED 11.08.2019

This week was one of those weeks in which he had predictions or dire warnings of an extreme weather situation. Certainly it's been pretty cold. There have been rain and winds that have made a fair bit of a difference to people. It hasn't been as widespread as it was at first predicted. Generally speaking, when the weather bureau tells us, batten down the hatches and bring in the dogs and cats and whatever, they have a fair idea of what's happening and it's better to take notice of what they're saying. But every now and again you get these dire warnings, whether for cold and storms, rain and floods or whatever, or the opposite in summer of just horrendous heat and all the terrible threats of bush fires such as we had nearly a week before Black Saturday.

When those things come one of the memories I have goes back to 24 January 1982. I was at the Parish of Saint Marys in Altona at the time, and we were preparing on the Sunday afternoon to take a group of teenagers away on a camp. That morning was one of those terrible, ugly days. At 10 o'clock it was well over 40 degrees. It all changed in the afternoon when a horrific storm came through and Altona copped it very badly. A lot of people were hurt on the other side of the Bay with corrugated rooves and flying debris. And I was not far from getting the kids on the road to camp when I got a call to say that there was a terrible incident in the park in Altona in Pearce Street.

I went down and a tree had fallen and crushed a lady and her grandson in a car. It had crushed the car down to door level. The ladies name what's Camilleri - funny the things that you remember. The little boy nearly died, but eventually did live. The only thing I could do as a priest, or the best that I could do in terms of anointing her was to reach in and anoint her arm. It was one of the only parts of her I had access to. It was one of those terrible things that happened at the time and is part and parcel of the life of a priest and others – some much more so – ambulance people and other emergency services who are in those circumstances all the time. I have never forgotten it. Chilling, sobering, awful parts of my ministry.

And then we get the gospel. Is it all about being prepared for death? It's partly that. But it is also being prepared for life.

A while back I read a talk by Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, who back in 2005 was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He gave this very good talk - you can find it on YouTube. He was talking to the graduating students at Stanford, and he said, 'When I was seventeen I read a quote that went something like - *that if you live each day like it is your last someday there will be a day when you will certainly be right.*'

It made an impression on me and since then for the past 33 years, I've looked in the mirror every morning and I've asked myself – 'If today was the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' Whenever the answer has been 'no' for too many days in a row, I've known that I've needed to change something.

As it turned out about seven years later the cancer returned and as you probably know Steve Jobs died. Notwithstanding the enormous success he had in the area of technology, none of us go on forever.

We have these sayings about living your life each day as though it were your last day, but there is a bit of a trick to that because if we emphasised, 'today could be the last day of my life', what do you do about planning the future? What do you do about just doing your normal job? What do you do about studying for an exam? There are things in our life which are important, and which involve a sense of looking to the future. There is a balance we need to strike.

What Jesus is saying in the gospel and what Steve Jobs was saying in his quotes about living each day as though it were your last is about priorities, and it's about opportunities. It's about life not only about death. It can be about death, and certainly it can be about today is the last day of my life. But it can be about building bridges – calling someone I've had a falling out with and haven't spoke to for a long time. Good. Do it now. But it can be other things we need to do which are about the longer term. It's about getting that balance which can be so difficult.

It's about recognising that each day is an opportunity and has a vitality and in God's terms a grace all of its own. Somehow, we need to run with that and maybe especially put a little bit of extra emphasis on the spiritual side of our life, our prayer, our awareness of God, our connection with God. To say, well maybe I need to be that little more aware that God may come into my life in any of many different ways.

One of my favourite stories was how I tipped the trifecta of the 2000 Melbourne Cup at the weekend mass prior. I tipped it from the Altar. Part B of the story is that at that time I was at the Mitcham parish and we used to record the mass on a VHS tape for those who were shut in at home.

One of our special ministers came to mass and took the tape from the previous Sunday with him and went on his usual communion round. He went to this lady, who was a very devout lady, but also loved the races. Now it was about 11 o'clock on Cup Day and she was all set for the races on

tv. But she put that aside to say communion and say her prayers and then the special minister went off to the next person, leaving the video tape behind. She looked at the tape, which she'd always been in the habit of playing right after communion and she looked at the form guide and she knew the next race was on in 10 minutes. She said, 'God won't mind, I'll watch the mass tomorrow.' She did. Cup Day came and Cup Day went, and the next morning, true to her promise, she put in her video tape to watch the mass, and there was the parish priest tipping a \$3500 trifecta, which she would have been on to like a shot had she watched it when she normally did! And they say, God doesn't have a sense of humour! He does, Thank God!

There is that sense of opportunity and maybe that emphasis on the spiritual side of our life which we take for granted. It's not as though we need to spend all day in prayer or penance or both, it's just maybe cranking up the importance of God and the importance of living as the Lord wants us to live. It can make us see each day that we are given in a new and important light.