

FR. JOHN SHERMAN'S* HOMILY DATED 25 AUGUST 2019

*(*N.B. FR. Kevin Dillon is currently away until August 29th, 2019)*

My dear friends as we look at God's words, there are all sorts of contradictions to it and it is important for us to deal with this as we find our way through this glorious message that sent us on faith and sent us on discipleship.

Well, one commentator I saw yesterday, last night actually as I was reflecting on this, so many people want faith to be cosy like a nice, electric blanket on the bed and don't realise that the journey of faith is the journey of taking up one's cross.

As I reflect on today on the word of God, I always thought of my own mother – she died at the age of 93 many years ago, and she was a single parent, had a pretty tough life. She was a nurse and she worked until she was about 70. Those days you don't get the pension if you are post-bonus. She said "why should I take the pension when I could work?" But a couple of comments she made drove me home a little snide. That life is a journey. And even though she has tough times, she said "I'll never criticize my God." That resonated with me for years – that "I'll never criticize my God".

But one day when she was going into micro-degeneration, in a nursing home, I was walking with her down to the chapel, she turned to me and said "You don't know how hard this is." The only little word of complaint I've heard from her. Wasn't even really a complaint, it was a comment.

And I find it is important for us all to realise and I sometimes say, when I was doing some work for the Year 12s recently – I call it 'faith sharing with a pizza'. I had about ten of them at a time for a pizza and they share on their faith as we are talking. And I tried to point out to them – "you know, don't expect your journey of faith to be easy. But we are all on a journey." You are on a journey and I am on mine, even on this grand age. It is a journey of faith. And that background really leads us to the deeper meaning of the Word of God tonight – that we are all on a journey of faith and that journey of faith is not likely to be like an electric blanket on a nice wintry night in bed, it's meant to be the journey of faith that points out our cross.

As Jesus said to each of us, He said "take up your cross and follow me". He never asked anyone to take up His cross because each of us have a journey with a cross. And on that context of reflecting on that, we look at the first reading with Isaiah, basically makes it very clear that God is going to welcome people of many nations, to try to pick out who is going to be saved is not possible. In the book of Apocalypse, they gave the number a hundred and forty four thousand – that's twelve by twelve and a thousand. All that says is, many, many, many will be saved.

The context of the Gospel there when the guy comes to Jesus and say "will only a few will be saved" – scripture says he is talking as a Jew to a fellow Jew. And he is really challenging the concept of "we are the chosen people". And if we just follow the law, letter of the law, it may not be how you are going to be saved.

Only those who enter by the narrow gate. And the narrow gate is really our cross. Our personal challenge – that we are asked to take up our personal challenges, making decisions that really are searching for God’s will for each of us, and for everyone here this evening, it could be something different.

I give out to one of my jobs in the oblates is vocations, journey with young people in their journey of seeking their vocation. I give them out a little card which I call ‘The Icon’. The Icon of Jesus is a traditional one of Jesus as a teacher, putting his hand and blessing – this one is NOT Him blessing, He’s point to Himself – He is the blessing but on the back I have, “Learn who you are in the eyes of God”.

Everyone of us in having this special journey, this journey of faith, needs to appreciate that we are special. The cross that God has given us, is a cross that is fitting for us.

I’ll always remember the redemptress that is giving a sermon in my parish church as a boy that was growing up, said “if we all threw our crosses in the centre here, and saw what others had to put up with, we would all quick run and grab our own.” Anyone want to get rid of their cross? It’s worth thinking on. We are all called by God for a purpose and He loves us all.

But then the journey of faith and discipleship, the other comment I had at the back of the card is, ‘We are all called to make this world better. Pray you are answering your call.’ And that’s where the whole question of self-centredness comes out. All of us have to work on ourselves, doesn’t matter if we are fourteen years of age or ninety-three, we are all on that faith journey. In a few days time, I’ll be eighty three and I’m still on a journey and still full of life. And that is the journey you and I need to remember.

So when. We come to the Gospel, it says, a beautiful comment, if Jesus there goes into the house, and He goes knocking on the door and you say “hey, hey Lord, I met you in the street and I heard you preaching” – Life is more than that, life is decisions. Life is decisions to choose Jesus. And that’s a pretty tough one.

Sometime ago I was talking to our boys in a school in Brisbane and I said “What’s gone wrong with Australia?” And one kid of nine put up his hand and said “Father, we have lost our spiritual soul.” For a Year 9-ner, that was a very deep kind of comment. “We have lost our spiritual soul”. And that is something to reflect upon tonight. Do I walk with Jesus? Do I allow Jesus to be my companion so that we hear Him calling to us – calling to us through the call that each of us has.

And we go to that second reading there from Hebrews, where we are reminded that God is like a father. Now the reason I mentioned to you about my mum is that I’ve never complained – in our carrying our cross, in our following our journey, it will be hard at times. It will be hard. And that is when we have to remind ourselves that God is a father, or a mother. What parent will not sometimes have to correct their children? What parent would not have to sometimes say to their child – you are doing the wrong thing, straighten yourself out. I like to put this question frequently, “whose parents have ever said to them I don’t want you associating with so and so” and nearly every hand goes up.

And God at times will correct us. God at times will call to us through suffering. We have to listen – to listen to God calling us. And it is beautiful there in the last passage of the second reading, we are told *'hold up there your limp arms, and steady your trembling knees and smooth out the path you tread; then the injured limb will not be wrenched, it will grow strong again.'* In other words, if we are prepared to carry our crosses, to listen to God's call, 'okay, we will get punched around a bit, we may be suffering from certain illnesses, there may be things that happened in our lives that God is testing us, but if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we will grow. And that is our call.

During the week I was preaching on the cross, one commentator I looked into gave me a new insight, that every time we look at the cross, not the crucifix but the cross at this stage, without Jesus on it, it is basically made up of two elements, the vertical piece of wood which represents our journey to God, the horizontal – our journey to our neighbour. And you will notice that the horizontal is carried by the vertical. In other words, only when we really live out our journey to God, are we able to carry our responsibilities to our neighbour. Powerful isn't it? I need through our journey of faith to understand my journey with my brothers and sisters and myself.

But then you come to the crucifix with Jesus on it – Jesus on the crucifix, with the cross on the back, is the center. It is through Him that we go to the Father and are united to God. And it is through Him that we receive the grace, not just to love God with all our hearts and soul and strength but to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. He is the center of the mystery. That is important for us to realise and that is why as we gather here tonight, Jesus is with us.

Recently there is a famous preacher in the United States that is Roger Baron, made an interesting point – he said a survey done in the United States, 70% of people saw the eucharist as a memorial of Christ in the pascal supper, 80% of the people saw it as memorial. He said, we have a problem. The problem is we have not given hope to our people through our catechisms, the reality of the reality of the realities – that in the eucharist, Jesus is present. He's truly present here. Do we believe it? That Christ is present in this word, that He is present in the community, that His deepest presence – I compare it to hugging a child, He is present in the eucharist. Not a memorial. It is a reality. And that is why in communion, Jesus enters more deeply into our journey of life to give us our strength to carry our cross. To be his disciples. This prayer and this eucharist then, that even though we may be knocked around a little bit, if our journey of faith tests us, that we will grow strong because the Lord is with us. Let that be our prayer tonight.
