

Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 15.09.2019

Every now and again, there is an outcry about some of the rather strange graduate courses that are held in some of our TAFEs and universities and whatever. You can get degrees in all sorts of different areas of life. It used to be just medicine and law and a few other areas of science, now it's all sorts of interesting things. I think there is certainly room for a graduate course, and I think we would probably all need to sign up for it, in how to read parking signs. If there was one area, and that would be followed by the, in racing terms, the second leg of the quinella, how to read speed signs. Now you might say the second one's pretty easy isn't it, it's 40 or 60 or 80 or whatever. And that's true, except you know what it's like, you're going up and you see '40 zone ahead'. So you slow down, and you slow and you slow and you slow. And all of a sudden you realise I left that 40 sign about 5 kilometres behind me, I'm still doing 40, I have no recollections of seeing anything that said any differently. But because all the traffic is zooming past me, well maybe I missed it. Maybe it wasn't there to miss and everyone else that's zooming past thought the same thing.

The whole area of parking, Saturday morning, Sunday afternoons or nights, whatever it might happen to be. All this fine print, you nearly need either binoculars or magnifying glasses to read them. Now speed signs are important, and parking areas are important that people obey so that there's something for everyone. However, every now and again because we are human beings, we will mess it up. We'll miss the 40 speed zone until the letter turns up. It used to be Senior Sergeant Richie, I think he's retired now thank goodness I haven't had a letter from him in a while. But rules and regulations, they are enormous. I went to the seminary 100 years ago, and I was told on my first day I'm sure it was, "you keep the rule and the rule will keep you." Oh well, we'll try that. And we did and most of the time we kept the rules, and we're still here. But the whole application of rules and regulations, let alone council bylaws, and how they're promulgated and enforced and all the rest of it is becoming greater and greater.

There are signs everywhere. Telling us what to do, how long we can be there, what speed we should go etc etc etc. And every now and again, we break them. We mightn't need to break it, we might just inadvertently look the wrong way or done the wrong thing or whatever- and the wrath of who knows what can descend upon us. And we are then the

lost sheep. See that's what happens to the lost sheep; he had a free spirit, he didn't keep the rule. The shepherd said "alright, all you sheep stick together. No wandering off". Like a bunch of kids on a school excursion or whatever. But the lost sheep somehow or other, he saw something that attracted his interest so off he went, he was just that sort of sheep that was interested in other things. And before he knows it he looks around and "where is everybody?" And he's lost, and the shepherd goes after him. The shepherd doesn't get there and say "you idiot sheep, why didn't you keep the rule." The shepherd is understanding, we see those beautiful pictures of Jesus with a sheep on His shoulders, bringing the lost sheep back. Treasured, and back to his home.

The whole area of rule keeping and whether we are or are not the lost sheep; whether we're with the herd, or whether we're somehow out on our own is a very tricky business, especially today. Because sometimes it's personality. Some people are born that way that they particularly, if they get into a job like parking attendant. These days it's a machine that does most of it of course. But there are some ways in which it might be the person who works for the utilities company and you've got a bill that you don't understand. And some are terrific and some are not terrific. And somehow or other we've got to work our way through those sort of challenges all the time. Where we find lost sheep, or we are the lost sheep.

How do we apply the rules and regulations of life? Poor little lost sheep, he understood he was supposed to stay with everybody but he just got a little interested in other things and off he went. Two examples which I've always remembered from a little while back, but both true. A lady had her car parked in her garage, and it was an electronic door. And there was a power blackout. The result of the power blackout, the door mechanism on the electronic door went into some sort of lock down mechanism. And she happened to contact me, what do you do. And I said "well, you can't get into your car, are you in the RACV?" And she said yes. I said "how long have you been in the RACV?" She said about 46 years. "Have you ever called upon them?" Never. I said "we'll ring the RACV and tell them".

Well. I'm sure RACV have lovely people, and they do, working for them but this wasn't one of them. She got onto this lady who said "no we can't send someone to you,

you can join RACV emergency home assist program.” How much will that cost? “That’ll cost about \$650.” Per visit, or something like that. She couldn’t start her car because she couldn’t get to the car because the door was down and she couldn’t fix it. All it needed was someone who was tall enough and who knew what to do to flick a switch. The whole thing would’ve taken 90 seconds maximum, but no “can’t do that, you haven’t used the emergency road assist for ages, but that doesn’t matter just keep paying your money”. Not a good story, not a good result. And now I’ve told all of you. Now I say that’s a while back and hopefully RACV have said “hey, we can be a little bit flexible on this sort of thing. It’s no drama for one of our guys to call by, zip in, flick a switch for an elderly lady that can’t get her car started, because she can’t get into the garage and get it working”.

The other side of the story is where people maybe are in an area where the rule has been broken, but they are prepared to just take things quietly. Some years ago I took a friend to the football, I’ve been a member of the Melbourne Cricket Club for many years. My dad put my name down when I was about 6 years old I think it was. Anyhow I became a member and took this friend as a guest. It was a cold night, it was Friday night at the footy and we’re all sort of rugged up. He was a war veteran and like many, was a smoker. And he went outside at half time to have a smoke. And he didn’t come back- half way through the third quarter I heard the phone going. He said “I’m outside and I can’t get back in.” And I said why not? And he said “well the fella on the gate says the rule says in the members I’ve got to have a shirt with a collar on.” But I said you can’t see your shirt, you’ve got a big duffel coat zipped up and scarf and whatever. He said “it doesn’t matter, they asked me to take off the scarf to have a look. This is genuine, I just have a tshirt, and a jumper, and a scarf, and a duffel coat over the top, he won’t let me back in because I was supposed to have a shirt with a collar.”

I said hold on, so down I went to talk to this fellow. Told him that the gentleman concerned had put his life on the line for his country which he had, and it made no difference at all. So I thought well here we go, take me to your superior. And so reluctantly, he did. We came to the superior, the manager for the night, explained the situation, and he said follow me. And we went down to a room, and he produced a shirt with a collar. He said “here, put this on.” So he put on the shirt to give it back to them at the end of the game.

So the shirt when on with the collar, and the scarf and the duffel coat, and the shirt couldn't be seen, it was no different than what it was in the first place, but he had a shirt with a collar on and he got back in, and we gave the shirt back at the end of the game and all was well.

Now the moral of the story is in neither case was a crime being committed, in neither case was anyone going to be done any harm. In both cases, there was a way in which the rule could still be observed and life could go on without any damage. But one chose to go down the absolutely rigorous, no prisoners taken path. And the poor little sheep, he was just out in the wilderness and he was going to stay there in the locked garage. But in the other, the sheep was given a shirt to put on with a collar, and away we went and the rest of the game was enjoyed.

The whole notion of how you and I our rules, because there are lost sheep in the lives of us all. And there are people who break the rules, people who maybe turn up late for an appointment. People who don't behave the way we might expect them to behave because maybe they've had a few drinks or whatever and we're very upset. But maybe we know why they've had a few drinks, because something very difficult and sad or traumatic has happened in their lives. But no they did this, they were a disgrace, not going to cut them any slack whatsoever. And so the examples roll on. There are lost sheep that you and I are called to go after. Just as you and I can also be the lost sheep. How do we apply the rule, our rule of behaviour, or our rule of what we do? Whether a borrowed car was delivered back right on time or 10 minutes late or whatever.

Now we're all different, but lost sheep- that can be each and every one of us. Searching for lost sheep maybe, being annoyed by lost sheep, as I'm sure the shepherd in the story would have been annoyed. But by the time he got to the lost sheep he was so glad to find the lost sheep that he didn't worry about it. And so it goes on. That's a great story, and a great parable and model for us to work on. Who are the lost sheep in my life, and how do I treat them? Do I go after them with love, with perseverance and maybe with forgiveness? Or do I say you've broken the rule and that's it. And then how do I feel if that harsh rule is supplied to me. This is not about drunk driving or bad use of drugs or breaking and entering and that sort of stuff.

This is about the ordinary humdrum things that happen in all of our lives. Where we can cut people some slack, and treat people the way we'd like to be treated ourselves, or whether we are harsh and unforgiving. Very like the story of Jesus of course and the two servants. One forgiven the lot, and he's forgiven but he's very unforgiving for the fellow who owes him some money. It's a challenge for us, but when we get onto the rule book to say how much does it matter? Can it be fixed, and is there a better way of resolving it? We are the lost sheep ourselves, we have lost sheep to pursue. Let's ask that we can maybe treat other lost sheep the way we'd like to be treated ourselves. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.