

## FR. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 22 SEPTEMBER 2019

Most of us are familiar with the old term of "there's no such thing as a free lunch". Everything has a cost. Doesn't have to be a financial cost. There is a balance in life that we seek to find out and sometimes you find out the hard way.

I have been fascinated for years of the ads that come on after TAB Sports Bets. It's on tv, radio and so on. The little phrase 'Gamble Responsibly'. Good advice. Can it be done? Yeah, I think it can be done, in the sense that there are many people who enjoy the races coming into the Spring Carnival, maybe have a bet on the footy, maybe not this 'who's going to kick the third goal in the fourth quarter or something like that' but maybe where there is some skill involved, maybe like try to pick a winner or so on, but there are people who do gamble responsibly where they put some money aside and say "that's my entertainment money. And if I win, I win, if I lose, I lose. And if I win, I probably will get it next week and if I lose I'll probably get it back next week." A lot of people look at it that way and don't have an issue. It doesn't impact on their well-being, or that of others.

There is a proportion of people of course, for whom responsible gambling is just not possible. It becomes an addiction and it can destroy their lives and the lives of many others.

Many studies done over the years, tragically the suicide rate amongst problem gamblers is – depends which study you read – but it's somewhere between five or ten times more likely amongst problem gamblers over so many other people in the general population.

So, money worries of course can destroy marriages and lead people into crime. The way in which we handle money be it responsibly or irresponsibly, can open up an enormous Pandora box within us if it's not handled or managed the right way.

And the song "Money, money, money. It's a rich man's world" and yet there is so many stories over the years of people who won Tatts Lotto or won enormous wealth or lotteries or so on and their lives have turned into an absolute nightmare – because majority of people do not know how to handle particularly large sums of money responsibly.

Maybe today with this gospel, it's sort of a curious sort of gospel – we'll take just the last line where Jesus says "you can't be the slave of both God and of money". In other words, it is a very tricky and very challenging area of life. And that is for all of us and maybe especially in the church because over the years, people take arm-reach and say "you never go to church except that they are always talking about money". Well, I am not sure how true it is, it might have been – in earlier days perhaps, particularly when people really had to scratch in order to build up a parish, build up a church. I suppose even in good days, when so many people were coming to mass, people were giving what they could to build churches and build other infrastructure in the parish from freely given offerings – that's the tricky bit, getting our own from freely-given offerings is always a bit of an issue but you do the very best that you can.

Maybe today is the day we can look at that command of Jesus of the admonishment – that you can't be the slave both of God and of money. The word 'slave' is well-chosen, because a slave is someone who is totally over-powered by someone else and does their bidding. So what is the bidding of money within our lives?

Often quoted but it made an impression on me, the day I heard it first, words of wisdom not from the Scriptures, but from my friend John from 3AW Breakfast. They were having a discussion as they do on lots of things about the Seven Deadly Sins. Somehow the topic came out, what is the deadliest of the Seven Deadly Sins? People rang in and they said it was lust, gluttony, whatever. And John Burns said with great insight, "there is no doubt about it, the deadliest of the Seven Deadly Sins is GREED." And how right he was. It is Greed behind world wars, it is behind violence in the home, it's behind crime on the streets, it's just something that can overtake us. Some things are never enough no matter how much we have.

Over the journey of my time as a priest, I have seen so many awful situations that have emerged out of greed. Of good and solid marriages that somehow collapsed because one or the other got hooked into the races or the casino or especially, the pokies and it just completely went out of hand, the marriage breaks up, the kids are divided and there is absolutely nothing left for a couple who could have gone for twenty thirty years or more in great happiness but somehow the grip of greed comes in and all things go haywire.

I have seen people been sent to jail because someone who have given them a job when they are in need of an employment and has been tremendously good for them, they went to embezzle money even though they are given the job by a benefactor, and repaid him or her by embezzling money and treating them appallingly. And so it goes in in any number of different ways, the inability that we have, not just to gamble responsibly but just to handle money responsibly is in some cases quite immeasurable.

I would imagine that for all of us here tonight, everyone here will have at least one story where we have become aware in the lives of others, or maybe at some point in our own lives, where this inability to handle money well – which means to me, the slave of money, have somehow entered into lives.

Then almost every family can be there, people just wanting so much, putting things on the credit card, and it all comes in at the end of the month, and so it goes on. And yet we need, so little ultimately, especially in a country like this. Who is the last person who has died of starvation in Australia? Who was the last person who couldn't get anywhere because they didn't have a car etc? There is poverty – sure, and it is very heavy for some people, but somehow or rather where we have a reasonable amount, there is something within us that says it is never enough.

Leo Tolstoy was a great Russian writer – wrote great long novels but he also wrote marvellous little short stories. He wrote one which was entitled "How much land do we need?" There was a story of a farmer who worked very hard, had a loving family and as he gradually increased the productivity of his farm, he was about to buy a bit more land. And then he heard the story of a tribe of very simple people, some distance away who had some wonderful farm land but it could be going at a bargain rate.

So he leaves his little village and sets off to find this place, eventually finds them, he said to them "I would like to buy some land." They said "yes, it would cost you a thousand rubles." So he said "but for how much land?" They said "well, you give us a thousand rubles, and you set off at sunrise tomorrow, and you walk in a circle, for as far as you can, and you mark out little spots along the way on the perimeter of the land, and when you get back here as long as you are back here by sunset, it will be yours." And he thought "this is fantastic." Off he goes at sunrise in the morning, and he decides he was going to cover a lot of ground, the further he goes, the more land he was going to have, and he was putting in the markers in as he goes. Eventually, as the afternoon goes starts to get to 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock, he realised he was still a fair way – so he has to run to make the circle to get back where he came from and eventually staggers to the line just as the sun sets. But he was exhausted, and worn out from the immense physical effort he made to cross this enormous part of land he was going to own that he collapses in front of the tribe that was selling it and dies. And all he needs, how much land does a man need – only six feet, front to back and down. Well, Leo Tolstoy told the story far better than I, but he also took a lot longer. But the essence of it is clear, in terms of what do we need and what do we grasp at.

Jesus words are challenging, even uncomfortable in a way. We don't like to think of ourselves as a slave of money, and hopefully most of us aren't. But from time to time, we can get in a grip of greed.

Let's pray maybe for ourselves, that we don't go down that path, pray for maybe some that we know, who is going down that path in any number of possible areas. Pray for the sense of what we need and what we want, are not necessarily and quite often aren't tied in together.

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