

Fr KEVIN'S HOMILY DATED 29.09.19

I know some people are confused as to whether I follow Sydney or Geelong; the answer is both. I am bi-partisan; Geelong since my appointment to that wonderful community, nearly 20 years ago and Sydney and South Melbourne from since I was a little kid. I was one of the first at the lake oval many years ago. I guess a life time of the red and white means that on grand final day for the past 14 years I have thought back to grand final day 2005 which was a memorable day, not only was it Sydney's first premiership for 72 years, but it was through the generosity and consideration of a fellow priest. It was my opportunity to start the day very early by attending the grand final breakfast at a place called Jeff's Shed, that it certainly was in those days and so the whole day was just unbelievable, the grand final breakfast, and then the game and the premiership and whatever. I thought of that priest today, in fact I often think of him.

He was a very kind and considerate person. He died a few years ago and while he remained a faithful and faith filled priest all his life and while he was never in any situation or trouble of any kind, his funeral was by his own wish, a simple grave side service; wasn't a mass, but lots of us celebrated a mass for him. There was no hierarchy present; over the years he had become so angry and disillusioned with the governance of the church, my church, your church; so in his final illness and as he prepared for death, he wanted none of it – tragic. A while back, I celebrated two funerals for a husband and wife, few months apart, they had been faithful, faith filled, dedicated and committed Catholics all their lives into their 80s. Similar story, the events of last 20 years were such that they switched off entirely, well almost entirely. My privilege to give them both the sacraments of the church which were of their own wish and that of the family but again the funeral service was not the normal church service, it had a faith filled prayerful element to it but it was not conducted in a church I was involved, but the story has been repeated again and again and again. It's a story of the lady I call Margaret on the front page of our bulleting this week who wrote to me expressing her pain at nearly 90 years of age, describing herself as you'll see as an irate old lady classified a Catholic for 88 years, and she is so angry and I have spoken to her since at the fact she picked it up on my behalf I guess and I appreciate that, that we're going to pass a hat around to help people like one person whose situation is here in the bulletin looking for accommodation for him,

just something, got good references, his own furniture, but can only afford a very meagre amount of money each week because of his income and he is one of our lifeboat people.

I've had one response. I've sent out notes to all the parishes within reasonable distance of here. I've had one response and I'm not sure what we're going to do this week, we might be able to get him somewhere, but he could well be homeless by the middle of this coming week and that's not good and it's not right. I guess when I heard yesterday and it's on the front page of the paper today of one victim from Ballarat who's been paid a million dollars as a result of an out of court settlement. Because of changes in legislation in Victoria, he's been able to take on the church and good on him, and there'll be lots more like him. And yet at the same time, I thought of the Margarets of this world, an 88 year old who right all through her life has put money on the plate, worked for the church, made things for fetes, made sacrifices, here there and everywhere for nearly 90 years, and I thought is that what she expects to happen?

What a collision of priorities it is, because the real situation is that that gentleman who received that ruling out of court yesterday, what happened to him should never have happened, because people knew, people in authority knew, people who should have known better knew and so, what they thought might happen could happen, did happen and that fella's life is in tatters and even a million dollars is not going to bring it back again. According to the reports, because he was fought, because they argued tooth and nail, the whole kaboodle cost 3 million dollars because of legal costs going backwards and forwards, who's going to give in first. And so we come to church, what do we read, we read about the rich man and Lazarus. What did Lazarus want? He didn't want a mansion; he didn't want a gourmet spread for every meal. The poor man just wanted the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, but the rich man wanted to hang on to everything that he had, so he gave nothing.

We've had that story for 2000 years, we read it regularly and we still haven't got the message and at the end the gospel talks about the rich man saying "Send Lazarus to my father's house to give them warning" and because they were told they have Moses and the prophets and Abraham says "If they're not going to listen to Moses and the prophets, they're not going to listen to anybody". So how much have we learnt from the Moses and the prophets of the 21st century? Those who have called the church to account - the media, royal commission, parliament enquiries, but you

know most of all where is the message visible? Right here and in every other church across this country where there are so many empty seats, so many missing generations of children and grandchildren and great grandchildren of people who have worked and slaved and given for decades upon decades and generation upon generation and it's disappeared so quickly.

And is it going to come back, so who's going to fix it? One of the extraordinary things is that the people overall who have guarded the church down this absolute debacle of internal and external devastation are still basically calling the shots. If it was the footy club, political party, governing board of a business, there would be an election; they would have to stand by their record. We don't have any of that, none of it and look where we are. This is not about my, I suppose what some would say would be, just fanaticism, maybe it is. But you do get fanatical when you're talking to people every day, when you're trying to find some sort of accommodation so that someone is not, who was abused shockingly as a little kid, is not going to be homeless, 30 years later on and this is the issue that we face, all of us, as a church, the rich man and Lazarus, the crumbs is all that's needed.

What are the crumbs, the crumbs are not summed up in dollars and cents, the crumbs are summed up in care, in respect, in compassion, in justice; it costs so little and yet if they are denied, they can cost so much. A court case that's on the front page of The Age this week, there's going to be a lot more of them and the extraordinary and upsetting thing is that the people who will be making the decisions as to how that's played are the same people that have been there a long time and I'm not sure that they're really seeing it clearly at all. Last night, I got a call at about, a bit after quarter past 11 I think it was, to go to a hospital to see the family of the man who had just died very suddenly. He's not a parishioner, but the hospital or part of them had rung about three parishes before hand and they said 'Can you come?' so I said, "Sure that's what we're there for". So it took about 20 minutes or so to get there.

But I walked to this room with this elderly gentleman who had passed away quite suddenly with this distressed family as you would be and when I came away after saying the prayers and doing what I could to support them as much as you can and console them, I thought, even today how extraordinary it is that these beautiful people still have their faith. They still wanted the presence of God, the value of prayer and even the involvement of a priest at this critical time of their life.

Somehow or other this can still be a story of redemption. Sometimes we can think there is no hope, sometimes we think, well there just might be. I saw that at the footy in a fellow called Marlion Pickett who I'd never heard off until a few days ago, played his first game in the grand final and nearly won the Norm Smith medal.

Look at his history, a few years ago he was headed down a terrible path of crime, did a couple of years in prison, but somehow through good people and the grace of God he got his act together and there he was an absolute hero at the MCG.

Probably had he won the Norm Smith medal, that may have been even more popular than Dustin Martin who actually won it, fair enough on his merit. But what a story on this weekend, of the rich man and Lazarus – the one has got nothing and the one that has got everything and the gap between the two. We've got our own area of redemption that we've got to look at, more than looked at, has to be found or else, where's this poor fellow going to be during the middle of the week and in order to be able to support such people, we flog tickets to concerts.

It's good to have concerts, good to enjoy a night together but to have that as necessary in order that people like him can be fundamentally supported for some of the most basic things of life like a roof over his head, that's a disgrace! So, am I venting my spleen? probably, but I've been having to do that for a long time and sadly, I suppose the planets have aligned this week with a few things all coming together. It's nice to finish, well I suppose, on a positive note of the redemption of one person, within the context of the football world. But where is redemption for our church, where are the decisions and by whom are the decisions going to be made which are going to take us on the direction that is truly the direction that Jesus had in mind when he gave this parable that we have today? I have no idea where that's coming from, but in the meantime, the rest of us down on the bottom rung, at least we can try and do what we can along the way.

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