

Fr KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 23.05.2021

On this Pentecost Sunday, one of the things we're doing here at St. Simon's, which is connected with Pentecost as the birth of the Church, we're going to recognise the spiritual birth or welcome of quite a number of children, about twenty all up, at two of our masses; children who have been baptised over the last few months will be coming to the Church, probably their parents will too I'll guess, cause they're only really little kids, just infants and not even up to toddler age but it's a way in which subsequent to their baptism we want to express to the families who have sought to be part of the Church and to put their children along for baptism, a sense of saying within the parish context with people all here in the Church, a sense of real welcome to these little children.

One of the things we're going to do to mark the occasion is we've got a little prayer which we put in a frame; it's a prayer that we encourage the parents to place beside their child in the hope that maybe once in a while and maybe, maybe every night, it's really a short prayer of thanksgiving and blessing for that little child that the parents say as a sort of a in a prayerful goodnight to the little one and dare I say we've got one for boys and one for girls and the prayer isn't substantially different but it does differentiate between him and her in the prayer and of course these days that we're venturing into tricky territory and horror of horrors in order that we make sure we give the right picture and it's all wrapped up in paper and ribbon and so on. We've got a blue ribbon for the boys and a pink ribbon for the girls and I am just waiting for the email that comes from someone, not necessarily one of the families, as a 'stereotype'.

Well, maybe, but you figure it out as how we're going to do it on a very busy weekend. Reality is of course we live in an age where no matter what you do someone is going to be upset or offended, hopefully not by that, but anything is possible. As Nick McCallum has often said, 'The world has gone nuts' and indeed there are many indications that that's more true than funny and it's within the context of that world, not just in terms of the cancel culture and all the other things that we've got where we offend everybody by trying not to offend anyone and such that it's in that context that Church has a whole new mission and it's not an easy one. The last fifty years, maybe going on sixty, you've probably got to back to 1960 to where the Church as it was for quite some time was in that sort of 'steady as she goes' mode and from about the sixties onwards, Vatican council and so on things changed markedly and it's a lot different now on any number of different levels.

We've got Churches who were built in those happy times and when everything was going swimmingly and they're three quarters empty, we can't find the priests to say mass in them and then when we do the number of parishioners attending are far, far less than needs to be

to create a viable situation into the future. But there's something to keep in mind as we look at all that, because we can so easily think not only the world is gone nuts but the church is gone nuts as well and there's plenty of people who will say 'absolutely!' and they will come from different perspectives in saying that. As Jesus said where two or three gather in my name, there'll probably be a blue, or actually Jesus didn't say that at all.

But it's something that can happen because right from the word go, the people of the early church were always having a go at one another and that's the way it was in the beginning, certainly is now and will probably be, ever shall be it's just the reality of people's perspective and on matters, religious and matters of faith, because they're important to us, we tend to see them and argue about them with a degree of passion and many at a time I've been guilty of saying 'Well if I was a judge, things would be different'. Well I'm not a judge and we just manage that as best we can. So here we are on Pentecost Sunday, often I remember a talk I had given by a Melbourne Auxiliary bishop a few years ago. He said, if we think that what we're experiencing, this and the turmoil of probably the 80s and 90s it would have been about 30 years ago.

And he said, the reality is of course, that's really the norm, the fights, the arguments, the upheaval, the instability, that's been the norm of the church, across its 2000 years history. What we have experienced, he said, and I think he's probably right, what we've experienced or we who are old enough to remember say from the 20s through to the 60s, he said that was the exception. It was a time of great calm, everyone knew where they were, churches were filled, people were doing the right thing or certainly seemed to be doing that on the surface etc. and it was a time of great growth. The church's voice was heard as being a very critical part of the way in which laws were framed and customs were lived and so on and we've seen all that unravel in the past 30 or 40 years in large to be, big time. But the other thing we need to keep in mind to get a sense of balance is not only has that been oh so different in the church, it has been oh so different in society itself.

Just look back to the way in which most people lived in the 60s and we see it even here, say at funerals and you'll see the photos, the black and white photos of people in the 50s or 60s when they got married and what they wore and the hairstyles and so on and that's only just the beginning of it. On so many different levels this is pre-technology, pre-computers, pre-mobile phones, all of those sort of things. Look at an old movie coming out of the 50s and 60s and it's a different world altogether. Even may be just look at may be a well-known actor just puffing on the cigarette, it's not going to happen today. On so many levels, we've improved in some areas and we've gone downhill in others. It's within that context that perhaps I just mention something which will affect us all into the near future, reality is that

the degree of practice of faith and contribution by activity or even dare I say financially the people to the church is nowhere near on the par with what it was some years ago and that means things are going to be different and they're already different and they're probably going to be more different.

Ultimately the challenge for you and for me is to really search our souls and say what's really important in terms of my faith in Jesus, in terms of the work of the church in spreading the gospel as best any of us can within the parameters within which we have to work and operate, and it's not going to be smooth sailing, it may have been a few decades ago, it's going to be difficult, it's going to be rough weather and for the sake of the message which is so important and which has been nonetheless through all the trials and tribulations of the past 2000 years that the spirit has been with the church to be able to get through even some of the most difficult of challenges and we're still in the many of them at the moment and may be today on this Pentecost Sunday, we can pray for our church, not just our leaders but for all of us as part of the church.

Because you are leaders, you're a leader in your own home, you're a leader when you're at your work, you're a leader in your social group. You can take the message of Jesus not by brow beating people but simply by acknowledging the importance

of your own personal faith within the context of the society which in large degree has put that to one side and we don't see parliamentarians drafting legislations saying, I wonder what the churches think about this, doesn't happen and it's probably not going to happen for quite some time into the future. We also happen to be making and certainly here and the Archdiocese of Melbourne, there's an initial plan starting to take some sort of focus of how we are practically going to manage into the future.

We've got lost of churches but not enough people and may be even less priests and many of the priests who we have, I hope they don't get offended if they hear this, they're borrowed, in the sense that they've been good enough to come from overseas countries and thank God they're here and thank them that they're here but many are here just for short term and they won't necessarily be replaced easily, let alone having to negotiate entry into Australia and COVID etc. etc. so it's not going to be easy, there's going to be things that are asked of all of us that they're not going to be all that palatable and they'll probably be multiple disagreements along the way because we all have our own perspective on how these things should be managed, what brought about a situation that maybe as challenging as it is.

But in the long run the focus needs to be dare I suggest on the person of Jesus himself and to recognise that even in the very early church there have been different perspectives

on what should happen and how it should be done but to keep our eyes focussed on the Lord and the importance of Jesus in the life of each and every person. So it will be may be a time where as in any storm, we have to hold tight, hold tight to our faith, hold tight to one another and particularly recognise how the gift of the church as a community of believers is still so important to us to bring is the things that we value so much in our life and just because may be things are moving in a direction other than what we think might be the answer, we have our voice to be heard, we can do our best to steer the ship in the direction that we believe us going to be important but above all we hang on to the Lord himself and not lose heart and not lose faith.

So hang on for the ride, there are some stormy waters ahead, there will be, but may be on this Pentecost Sunday, we can ask that the Holy Spirit, let's face it has got a fait bit in front of him for the time being, but to give us all the guidance and the support and the light that we need to carry the message of Jesus into the future.