

22nd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR A HOMILY 2020
FACING UP TO OUR CROSSES IN LIFE!
Mt 16.21-27 Jer 20.7-9 Rom 12.1-2

Well, now at least springtime is coming, with the buds bursting forth, the blossom is out, and the flowers already blooming, bringing colour into our ongoing ISO world, with our northern hemispherical neighbours awaiting the brilliant colours of autumn or *Fall* as they know it! Also out there, we have the nutters or conspiracy theorists who, among other things and mad delusions, object to the necessary restrictions imposed on us all at present. The fact that the figures for new infections are heading downwards in the right direction, with the good news of less than 100 new infections this weekend, despite the tragedy of the ongoing death toll, doesn't seem to pass muster with those purveyors of fake truth and deniers of reality. We've seen plenty of that in the last week, as with the virtual promise of a miracle vaccine appearing magically by Christmas, which is coming frighteningly fast (but certainly no vaccine without extensive testing and trials)!

Many themes come up this weekend, with it being Social Justice Sunday. I refer later to the ACBC statement worth reading and reflecting, as well as it being the time for our annual appeal for the Parish Refugee and Asylum Seekers' Group, so please contribute if you can, with banking information in the Parish Bulletin.

As we move on slowly and patiently, welcome to our latest edition of Weekend Mass for this 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, where Peter again comes to the fore, but in a somewhat negative way, with his wish to deny the reality of the rough and tough path ahead, as Jesus heads towards his ultimate fate in Jerusalem.

There is a paradox here, which reflects on all of us, really, as Peter, designated leader of the apostolic group, having been affirmed by Jesus for stepping forward and identifying him as the Christ, the one to follow, now repudiating the darker and more difficult side, as Jesus foretells future suffering and death, and not just for himself. We can all identify with Peter, not wanting to hear the bad news, after the Good News, but that's just the reality he was and we are in, in life, and as followers of Jesus, so we, like he, have to face up to the challenges and ups and downs.

Our current situation is unprecedented in anyone's lifetime (*unless you're over 100, and even then you wouldn't remember the Spanish Flu, except from the stories later told!!*). As lockdown drags on, and uncertainty prevails, we continue to appreciate and affirm those in the front line, providing necessary services in health care, education in all its forms, and beyond, to keep us going as comfortably as possible.

The crosses of life are many and varied, and where we are right now could be interpreted as one of those unpredictable scenarios, where our challenge is to face up to the reality of a new environment, where we need to adapt to the changes required and anticipate that things will never be quite the same again, once things do open up again. The insecurity of economic uncertainty is an ongoing concern, particularly for those who have lost jobs, or who have had to close their businesses, for example, as we keep them in mind. Then there is the negative pressure that can be brought to bear on our relationships, within and without our families.

Meanwhile, life and death goes on, with life being celebrated in the midst of it all. (I've had well over 20 funerals, in difficult circumstances for families, since the first lockdown in later March). We have lost quite a few faithful parishioners in recent months, Leigh Wallmeyer at 83 and Domenico Germano at 89, being among the most recent. When I anointed Domenico at home, surrounded by Maria, his wife of over 60 years (celebrated here only last year), along with his loving family, they had received the happy news of the birth of a seventh great grandchild, reflective of the circle of life going around. At his farewell Mass, Leigh's family provided many amusing anecdotes of a funny and loving man who loved his family, lived his faith and was a friend to many. In the midst of sadness and loss, there is joy and gratitude, with treasured happy memories and lessons learned to help us to live life well, learning from their good and faithful example.

We could well identify some of our crosses in the current scene, with limited opportunities to be physically present to each other, particularly grandparents and grandchildren. Yet we have the opportunity to use the wonderful technology of social media to keep in touch. (It can be confusing and tricky. My aunt Betty, about to turn 97, was trying to put the iPhone to her ear the other day, on a video call with me, as we shouted, at or to, each other, in a good sense, both being somewhat deaf!)

The crosses are real, and the burdens heavier for some than others, which is a reminder that we don't carry them alone, but (*as Beatle Ringo sings to us*) get by with a little help from our friends! There is for some, the frustration and loneliness of isolation at home, the anxiety of uncertainty, fear of the future, concern for our loved ones, and the emotional and psychological pressure of not being free to do what we want to and go where we wish, apart from the economic uncertainty. But it's all for a good cause, called the 'common good', and for our own health and welfare protection. We need to look at the bigger picture and hope for a better future, with understanding, acceptance and patience.

There are several themes for this weekend, as I mentioned earlier in our Church calendar, it being Social Justice Sunday, and I recommend you read the annual statement from the ACBC (Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference) titled ***"To Live Life to the Full: Mental Health in Australia today"***. Perhaps particularly in the present time, the issue is relevant to where we are with the coronavirus crisis. Many do feel very much weighed down by their situation and limitations, and the experience can be extremely debilitating. The document reflects on our need to be understanding and empathetic towards those whose mental health is adversely affected, and where the unfair stigma of negative and judgemental attitudes can so easily be to the forefront. We can all be caught up in this scenario at some stages of our lives and relationships.

And let us remember that a significant part of Jesus' mobile ministry was in outreach to those afflicted with diseases of the mind, often misinterpreted as demonic possession, according to the prejudices and associated blame games of the day, that such things were almost deserved!

My favourite author, Dr Seuss, once wrote a book titled: ***"Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?"*** In a wildly imaginative way, he reminds us of the relativity of our worries and concerns: *"When I was quite young and quite small for my size, I met an old man in the Desert of Drize. And he sang me a song I will never forget. At least, well, I haven't forgotten it yet. He sat in a terribly prickly place (on a cactus!). But he sang with a sunny sweet smile on his face. When you think things are bad, when you feel sour and blue, when you start to get mad... You should do what I do. Just tell yourself, Duckie, you're really quite lucky! Some people are much more... oh, ever so much more... oh, muchly much-much more unlucky than you!... Think they work **you** too hard...? Think of poor Ali Sard! He has to mow grass in his uncle's backyard and its quick-growing grass and it grows as he mows it. The faster he mows it, the faster he grows it... So don't you feel blue. Don't get down in the dumps. You're lucky you don't have a Borfin that shlumps. And while we are at it, consider the Schlottz, the Crumple-horn, Web-footed, Green-bearded Schlottz, whose tail is entailed with unsolvable knots... And you're lucky indeed, that you don't ride on a camel... And poor Mr Potter, T-crosser, I-dotter... And how fortunate you're not Professor de Breeze, who has spent the past 32 years, if you please, trying to teach Irish ducks how to read Jivvanese... Thank goodness for all of the things you are not! Thank goodness you're not something someone forgot... that's why I say, "Duckie! Don't grumble! Don't stew! Some critters are much-much, oh ever so much-much, so muchly much-much more unlucky than you!"*

Finally, on a more serious note, to conclude, I quote from my friend Vincent Long, Bishop of Parramatta (*whom I once lectured in Canon Law*): ***"Our challenge is to accompany people from the margins into a journey towards the fullness of life and love. We're meant to be in the coal face, in the messiness of it all, at the same time in fidelity to the Gospel... Like Christ in his ministry among the sick and the lost, we're called to meet God in the most unlikely people and places. We must be in that frontier space"***. And so, let's keep looking and living on the bright side, as we face up to the crosses, and make the most of, the joys and sorrows of our lives.