

26th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR A HOMILY 2020

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mt 21.23-32 Ez 18.15.28 Phil 2.1-11

Well, here we are again, so welcome in spirit to our ongoing virtual celebrations of Eucharist here at St Therese's in Essendon. Numbers of new infections, and deaths, are dropping steadily. so we can hope for some relief of restrictions now sooner than later. Meanwhile, patience continues to call in the midst of our frustrations.

This weekend we acknowledge the 106th *World Day of Migrants and Refugees*. The Parish Bulletin contains a reflection on their ongoing needs near and far, in particular, and Sister Margaret Moore RSM, co-ordinator of our parish Refugee and Asylum Seeker Group, has provided some current insights. Have a read.

We acknowledge and encourage with appreciation, the quiet, unassuming, effective service, friendship and support, which the members of the group continue provide to those in this category in our local community. Please consider contributing to their good work. Kind words do not suffice. Details for donations are in the parish bulletin. Thanks in anticipation for your ongoing generosity.

Impulsive reactions are natural but risky, when we say or jump into something that we haven't really thought through or reflected on the consequences. We all have our regrets about some of the things we've said and done in life, but once we acknowledge that fact and admit our faults, we are the better for it. It can be hard to do and sometimes is humiliating for ourselves, but good for the soul, as well as being the right thing to do! Then there is the connection we need to make between pious words of good will, and following through in action on what we say we will do. Platitudinous thoughts, empty words and bumper stickers are not enough!

We see too much of this in the world around us, where the blame game and pointing the finger at others, is always easier than facing up to our responsibility to do what we can to make things better by our own choices and actions. In the present climate of the coronavirus crisis, bad mistakes have been made, but our observance of the severe local restrictions imposed has at least led to a much lower level of ongoing infections, whatever we might think about the temporary limitations on our freedom.

On Friday we celebrated here, at St Therese's, the life of Pat Torr, living to 93, mother of Lyn and Leanne, a faithful parishioner wherever, marrying Albie here at St Therese's, in the sacristy (a terrible insult to the non-Catholic in those dark days!) on 27th December 1950, in her own quiet way, lived a simple life of faith, actively involved in every community where she was present, from tennis to parish life to Arcadia, where she happily spent her last 6 years or so. Her title or name to her 5 great grandchildren was just that: "**Great**"! Given current limits, they came here on Thursday, with 5 of her 6 grandchildren (the sixth in Cocos Islands, who did a reading from there!), the day before her funeral, and they had a little prayer service, with photoboard memories, reflecting on "*Great's love and life.*" It was all a wonderful warm and fitting tribute to a lovely lady.

I quote from her daughter Lyn's eulogy, after they settled as a young couple way back there in Niddrie: "*Their neighbours came from many parts of the world: Japan, Russia, Latvia, Poland, the Ukraine and more. Mum learned to greet them in their own language. She supported them, filling out forms, explaining school notes, caring for and patching up their kids. Mum and Dad supported them in times of joy and sorrow.*" In the simplest and most practical ways, here we have a woman of deep faith, responding with a firm and consistent **Yes** to the Gospel in action. Her humour and endearing and enduring smile will live on, along with the happy memories. (*And I'll miss the \$10 she'd always surreptitiously slip into my hand at the Sign of Peace when I'd say Mass at Arcadia!!*)

And now we leap forward in Matthew's Gospel, where now Jesus has entered Jerusalem, where we have a realistic family story with Matthew's parable of 2 sons, a parallel to Luke's Prodigal Son and his indignant or unhappy big brother. In this case, one says no and the other says yes to the father's request, but then the first thinks better of his negative response and goes forward in obedience and respect, to do the right thing, while the latter slithers out of responsibility after saying the right thing, but then not following through.

The Jerome Biblical Commentary has a Freudian take on it, suggesting that the first son reflects Oedipal conflict within himself, rebelling against his father, but then resolving this by eventual obedience. Whatever, what is clear is that Matthew is having a go at those questioning Jesus and criticizing his good words and works. They are further infuriated at his insinuations that they reflect the attitude of the second son who says the right thing and then goes against his word by just suiting himself and not complying by being true to his word.

The religious leaders and civil elders are already antagonistic to Jesus, as we hear in the preceding dialogue, where they question his authority, in envious and self-righteous tones, after he has turned over the tables in the Temple, kicked out the profit-mongers or racketeers, then offered healing and friendship to sinners and the sick, and welcomed and encouraged children.

What is more, shock, horror, to the leaders, is that those on the fringes of society at the time, excluded from the mainstream and looked down upon, are given credit, and even priority, by Jesus, as he speaks of tax-collectors (Matthew being the pioneer here), and serious serial sinners of all sorts, as welcome into his circle. Then there is the implication also of Gentiles, open in faith to his person and message, being part of the Kingdom he proclaims. Jesus sees through the hypocrisy of the leaders and confronts them directly, so that they hate the fact he can see straight through their self-importance and presumption of virtue because of their elevated position in Jewish society.

Jesus has already spoken of the '*righteousness*' of John the Baptist before him, and Donald Senior CP says that this is "*a fundamental concept for Matthew's theology, expressing the whole spectrum of proper response to God, including repentance and good deeds.*" Once again, words are not enough!

Brendan Byrne SJ once more puts it well, in relation to today's readings: "*God wants us to share eternal life as friends drawn by love, rather than puppets pulled by strings... in the hope that finally our freedom to say yes will prevail.*" Or, as Claude Mostowik MSC sums today's Gospel message: "*It's not what you say; it's what you do. Walk the talk!*" (Which we've all heard before). He extends our responsibilities to include the natural world in which we live, in terms of making sustainable choices, being inclusive, caring for not only the needy, but also the environment and natural resources, and appreciating the beauty and wonder of the world around us, much as Francis of Assisi reminds us from the 13th century, and Jesus in the first place, looking around at the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields, as well as responding inclusively to those on the outer, and the fringes of society, mindful in particular of refugees and asylum seekers on this 106th *World Day of Migrants and Refugees!*

john hannon

27th September 2020