

**HOMILY 28th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021**  
**WHAT TO DO TO BE SAVED? MORE TOUGH STUFF!**

*Mk 10.2-16      Gen 2.18-24      Heb 2.9-11*

Welcome again to Mass on-line, now the 28<sup>th</sup> weekend of Ordinary Time, with the ongoing reminder of the necessity of COVID vaccination, with another 1965 cases and 5 deaths in Victoria announced on Saturday, the highest number of cases since the start of this awful pandemic. It highlights the need to be observant of the restrictions, despite the fact we might resent here in Melbourne, being the most locked down city in the world for the longest period. The fact remains that this has certainly saved lives, probably thousands overall.

There is no denying the difficulties, particularly with access to the elderly in nursing homes, the sick in hospital, and the broader scene of seeing grandparents and other family members and friends face to face, but it's all for a greater good, with the risks associated with public health. So we need to keep up the patience and perseverance, as the road map to opening up edges closer. We continue to live in hope.

The 5<sup>th</sup> National Plenary Council of Australia has been in session for the past week, the first since 1937, in responding to the question we considered over 2 years ago now: *“What is the Holy Spirit telling us today?”* As the Church, we, the People of God, have a right to express our thoughts, opinions and hopes about all aspects of faith and life. The emphasis has been on open communication, listening with respect to diverse views, and for we as Church, to face up to past and current failures, to address indigenous and environmental issues, and openness to the Spirit speaking through the participation of a broad cross-section of the a Catholic community.

Here's hoping that something positive and ongoing results in changes to the way we do things as Church, and acknowledgement in more than just words, of where wrongs have occurred and where action needs to be taken to improve things, especially with encouragement involvement of those in our parish communities, and engagement with those on the outer. Evangelization is an eternal challenge and responsibility for us all to participate in our own way.

The *Prosperity Gospel*, as it is sometimes called, and still preached and practised in some circles today, goes way back beyond the time of Jesus, where it was considered by many that wealth was God's reward for those who deserved it, a self-serving excuse for the self-righteous. There was one caveat in the Jewish tradition, that being that there was also an obligation for the rich to look after the poor, but it could be imagined this wasn't always the result, as there also tended to be the thinking that the poor and disabled deserved their condition, because they hadn't tried hard enough, or had sinned in some way or other, or inherited the guilt, and so God's punishment was their fate. Bad luck!! *Not my problem* was the selfish and unjustified defence of many, one might suspect, a mentality that endures even today.

If we step back, however, and line this up with the Gospel preached by Jesus, we can surely see a chasm, or huge gap, between his teachings in word and action, and this distortion of what lived faith should be.

So, now for some further demands from Jesus, as we move from his setting the ideal of how a marriage partnership should be for life, as a couple grow in life and love, but without this being an absolute, where circumstances make this impossible, given the human factors involved. Then there was his welcoming of the children, in their helpless insignificance and lack of status in Jewish society, yet their openness to the simple things of human engagement, life and love.

Now he moves to speak of the call of discipleship to include a generosity of spirit, in sharing one's wealth, with the absolute wakeup call to give it all away. Don't we know this is an unreasonable and impossible demand, as being human, we are complex creatures, with physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions, starting with our basic material needs.

The first *Beatitude*, or *positive attitude* as I like to call it, refers to the poor in spirit, which can be taken as a call to share one's resources, but not to give it all away. We need to look after ourselves and those for whom we are responsible, in terms of material and financial security. But it is also a requirement to be generous in the way we share our resources, not giving in to avarice or greed in being grasping Scrooges, who won't let

go of anything, claiming *'it's mine, mine, mine'*, just because I think I've earned it. And let's not forget inherited wealth, gained through no effort of one's own!! (*Some classic examples immediately spring to mind!*)

It seems that the rich, and not necessarily young (as he's often described), man in the Gospel today approaches Jesus with sincerity, but on his own terms all the same, so that he can pick and choose what suits him. As usual, Jesus' style is polemic, in putting the extreme directive to give it all away, but that needs interpretation, as letting go of his own selfish priorities and opening his eyes to what the Gospel is really about. The challenge put by Jesus is to move beyond his own comfort zone, and to see a new priority in his life about discipleship being focussed on engagement with others and serving their needs.

The man has done all the right things according to the Law and Ten Commandments, but Jesus is looking into this person's soul more deeply, and asking for more than external observance, which is just not enough, keeping up appearances, just like the religious leaders of the time, for many of whom it was sufficient to observe the letter of the law and rituals, but without sincerity of heart. And yet they kept making up more laws as time went on, to make it more difficult for the ordinary people!

And what is salvation? For Jesus, it is about taking the values of God's Kingdom to heart, here and now, and not just waiting for and expecting a divine reward at the end. The proclamation of Jesus is an urgent call to order one's priorities to selflessness and service, not self-service and self-focus.

As Brendan Byrne SJ suggests: *"The fact, though, that he (the rich man) goes away sad shows that he is declining something that would have given him the fulfilment for which, at the deepest part of his person, it seems he was longing... All are called to a freedom from the kind of attachment to wealth that shows distrust of the God proclaimed by Jesus."* He was searching, but didn't altogether like what he had found, in Jesus' demands of detachment and change.

And I reckon Claude Mostowik also offers us a bit of wisdom as he concludes his reflection on today's readings: *"May we have the wisdom to see more clearly what our true treasures are. Encountering a stranger, community, the biodiversity of nature; clean water; making music and dancing; enjoying nature; writing poetry; and friendship."* And I might add, *family* too, with all of its associated permutations and combinations, and complications!!

*john hannon*

*10<sup>th</sup> October 2021*