

5th SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B HOMILY ESSENDON 2021
DRAWING ALL TO HIMSELF

Jn 12.20-33 Jer 31.31-34 Heb 5.7-9

On Friday 19th March, exactly one year since 2020 lockdown, we combined the Feast of St Joseph with St Patrick's Day with our St Therese's School Grades 1 and 2's, and Grade 4's came too. I couldn't find a children's story about St Patrick in my library, so I had to use *Look Out, Patrick*, about a little mouse named Patrick, narrowly escaping a vulture (who hits a big branch), a snake (who bites a drainpipe), 3 rather nasty rats (washed down the drain), a cat (chased away by a dog), a mousetrap with a big piece of cheese (Mum accidentally steps in to set it off, and save him from it!), and a clothes iron falling off the table, but missing him. It was Patrick's lucky day, so I could refer to the luck of the Irish saving Patrick, the poor, innocent little mouse!! After all, it was a story for 6 and 7 year olds! And young Denis O'Sullivan, our faithful Irish parishioner of over 90, told me after Mass that it was a good one. (It probably helped that I referred to the book *How the Irish Saved Civilization!!*)

I seem to have an affinity for Patrick, as I was ordained in St Patrick's Cathedral, my first parish priest at Croydon was Father Paddy Duggan from Ennis, still going strong at 90 (whom I've always sent an annual St Patrick's Day greeting, even in French from Canada), and my first parish in Broken Bay Diocese was St Patrick's in Asquith. In Ottawa, they even celebrate the day with green beer! (He was also featured in the stained glass windows in my parishes in St Brigid's Ottawa, now an Irish museum and St Mary's in Manly!)

As for St Patrick himself, it's a myth he drove the snakes out of Ireland, as it was too cold for them anyway, and his use of a shamrock to explain Trinity is doubtful too. Not so, however, the fact that he was the first person in human history to condemn slavery as evil and wrong, having been kidnapped and enslaved himself for some years. As well, he spread the faith in Ireland, the results of which we have seen ever since he was on the move there, in the 5th century.

It is said he appreciated and understood their culture and customs, and related Christianity to their way of life, more than just theorising with theological propositions. His focus was on the person and message of Jesus, still relevant and fresh today. Significantly, too, he helped keep the show on the road in Ireland in the following Dark Ages! So let's hear it for Patrick, and give him credit for being a very practical missionary in his time. He did it tough, persevered with courage and faith, and came out on top, certainly having a broad impact on the broader Catholic world in the long run, if we look at the world today.

Like Patrick, poor old Jeremiah earlier faced difficulties, as a reluctant and depressed prophet at times, feeling he wasn't being heard and even thrown down a well at one point (although at least he was lowered into the mud by ropes, so he lived to fight another day!). Yet, he perseveres, with a sense of mission, and today we hear a more positive meditation from him on God's mercy and forgiveness, with the Covenant of love between God and his people renewed, as they turn back to God in faith, as a community of believers in the One God, in the midst of all the pagan gods around them.

It is Jesus today, who has the darker reflection on his impending fate. The end of his public ministry is signalled by the arrival of the Gentiles, here some Greeks seeking Jesus, prefiguring a universal call to all. His soul is troubled, with John concerned about emphasizing Jesus' sense of commitment to his mission and ultimate destiny of death on the Cross, but the story not ending there. The analogy of the grain of wheat is easily understood, in the way of nature, as the seed has to break open for growth and new life to spring forth, in order to produce the good fruits of the harvest.

At the same time, it is not just Jesus to whom John is referring, but also his followers. Like Jesus, you and I, are challenged to face up to the crosses of our lives, as well as responding to the needs of others, and seeing Christian life as a positive way of living and giving of ourselves. And so we find fulfilment and happiness in service, producing the fruits of the Spirit.

During the week, I spoke to our Grade 6 students about Christian leadership, obviously starting with Jesus' model of servant leadership, by speaking the truth, facing up to opposition with integrity, challenging hypocrites, and focussing on the needs of ordinary people, and responding in practical ways, with love and

empathy. This far from the power and the glory and acclamation sought by some self-important types in our current world, who see leadership as control and service of self, above all, or those who see it as being a popular populist figure who just says what it is thought the people want to hear, and will vote for, next time around in the electoral cycle, presuming they get a vote.

I can't conclude without a further reference to Pope Francis, 8 years now as Pope, taking the serious risk of making a trip to Iraq, in order to reach out and promote peace and understanding between diverse peoples and faiths, in a very troubled part of the world.

And this week we have a short AV reflection on life again in Bangladesh, with Hamila, a young mother and Rohingya refugee from Myanmar, now in Cox's Bazar, with the largest refugee population in the world at present, a staggering 1.3 million people, aided through the ongoing support of Caritas, to provide improved conditions of water, hygiene and sanitation for all, which we just take for granted. Again, we are reminded the Project Compassion theme for this Lent of 2021 is "Be more". So, as part of our Lenten commitment, let's continue to donate through your envelopes or boxes, or by credit card or on-line.

john hannon

AUTUMN EQUINOX

21st March 2021