

HOMILY 31st SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
LOVE IS ALL WE NEED, BASED ON FAITH!
Mk 12.28-34 Deut 6.2-6 Heb 7.23-28

And now it's welcome to the 31st weekend of Ordinary Time, as we emerge from lockdown and freedom of movement which has been restricted for such a long time, more than 220 days here in Melbourne. We can now visit our *country cousins* and vice-versa, but still observing sensible requirements of vaccination and masks where prescribed, including in church!

Mass will be recorded on the parish website for the feast of All Saints and All Souls from Monday 1st November, and our Memorial Book to acknowledge those who have died in the last year and those we have registered to be remembered will be on display in the church from Wednesday for the month of November.

As well as face masks, there will be the requirement of proof of double vaccination, as well, for all attending Mass here at St Therese's in person, after we open up from next weekend from 6th-7th November.

Weekday Masses resume from Wednesday 3rd November. I'll continue to record weekend Mass on-line after we open up, as well, for those who can't be here in person or who are still anxious about the circumstances.

It hasn't been an easy or fun time for any of us, but, as I've said before, lockdown was more difficult for families at home with work and on-line learning for our students and teachers, than for individuals like me, in my own space, recording Masses, celebrating funerals, playing piano, reading, doing jigsaws and getting out for a walk, appreciating the lovely environment around us, from autumn to winter to springtime, as the days, weeks and months have gone by!

This Friday, Denis, one of my walking friends from Monash Uni days, was reflecting on how much has been said about the negative effects on mental health of the limits and isolation of lockdown, and also the financial difficulties caused for small business owners and casual workers, which can't be denied. But he suggested there could also be seen a silver lining for many, in terms of more time, spent with close family, and so, increased and deeper communication, perhaps doing more at home, as well as getting out for a walk in the local surrounds. We can take so much for granted, and maybe will appreciate our freedoms a little more now. Whatever, we have to live in the present and plan for the future, making the most of the opportunities before us.

This past week, there was held on-line a conference for Melbourne clergy, and 180 or so tuned in. Father Michael Casey OCSO, a Cistercian monk, provided some challenging input, in regard to how we all face coming out of the prolonged lockdown through which we have all been. He spoke of **"Emerging from COVID for mission in a brave new world"** (not the Aldous Huxley scary Big Brother type!), whereby he presented 7 themes along the lines of Pope Francis' teachings, these being "a paradigm shift, joy, synodality, inclusivity, interculturality (a step further than multiculturalism), fraternity (and sorority!) and our common home (planet Earth, third rock from the Sun)". In difficult times for our Church, he provides a spirit of hope and sense of mission for all of us. Francis speaks of **healing the world** with concern for the dignity of the person, the common good, the fundamental option for the poor, the universality of goods and solidarity.

We all need to be open to change, whatever stage of life we are at (*just look at our own lives, where we've come from, where we are now and where we are going!*), and be conscious that things just can't go back to the way they were. The opportunity is there to do things in different ways (*to which it's natural or easy to be resistant!*), accepting that you and I can't change the world overnight, or the Church, of which we are active members. Yet, we can all play our small part in being open-minded and inclusive of others in our community, and in being people of mission, who appreciate that the Gospel of Jesus is to be lived in action.

In his 2020 encyclical, **Fratelli Tutti**, addressed to all in the world, Francis reflects on the effects of the pandemic: "Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned (from the pandemic) was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations is denying reality." That holds for parish life too, as we consider how we might get things moving again in our local community and diverse groups.

Austin Ivereigh also presented, as an English papal biographer, who focusses on Francis speaking of the need for the Church to reach out to the people of the world, and to respond to their needs, not just trying to be the institutional controller of people's lives, ruling by decree, rather than engagement at the grass roots. Francis has experienced the human realities first hand, in his life as priest, and then Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and so understands that the Gospel of Jesus is not just lovely theory, theology, canon law and rubrics, but is to be lived! He speaks of *authentic change in the Church*, reaching out with compassion, rather than turning in on itself and excluding.

So this is where we come to considering the application of today's Gospel for ourselves. At the heart of it all is love of God, necessarily linked with love of neighbour, and might I add, love of self, as we need to have positive self-esteem, and to appreciate and use our own gifts, to be enabled to respond to those around us. Love is to be lived out in practice, in all of its dimensions.

Interestingly, today we have the unusually friendly Pharisee or scribe here, not out to test or trap Jesus, but to sound him out for his wisdom, quite a change of tone from the *Temple Police* types! Jesus is not so original here, except to make the clear and logical link between faith, love and action (*combining Deuteronomy 6.5 and Leviticus 19.18*). The scribe affirms Jesus, making no mention of the other 613 precepts of Jewish law of the time, as I might remind you of the 1742 canons of the 1983 Code of Canon Law (*at least down from the 2414 canons of the 1917 Code, with less penalties, as Archbishop Daniel Mannix apparently recommended in his late 90's!*), for which I was sent into exile in Ottawa to study for 3½ wonderful years of new friendships, parish pastoral ministry, snow-skiing and ice-skating, and travel opportunities!!

As Jesus puts it, the fundamentals of love have priority over the detailed prescriptions of law, then and now, and the ritual sacrificial practices of his time back there. As we return to the basics of the Gospel, we find the law of love at its heart, deriving directly from the teaching, preaching and activity of Jesus himself. Surely, that's our model for mission and ministry, the responsibility for which we all share by virtue of our common Baptism. All is based on the Gospel of Jesus, whose Kingdom of love, justice and peace, is to be developed and grown, here and now, but not yet, as we people of faith and hope, respond to the Spirit in our lives and our world!

john hannon

31st October 2021