

6th SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YEAR C HOMILY 2022
JESUS' SERMON ON THE PLAIN – LUKE'S BEATITUDES
Lk 6.17, 20-26 Jer 17.5-8 1Cor 15.12-20

This last week, I had an opportunity to return to Manly, where I caught up with old friends after celebrating the funeral of Marty O'Donnell, who had been a good friend and parishioner, along with his wife of over 60 years, Carole, marrying on her 21st birthday (*coincidentally on this date 13th February 1960!*), so he'd never forget to remember! He helps me with today's homily!

Marty had been given a dire prognosis some 11 years ago, and yet faced up with fortitude and determination to make the most of his remaining days, which turned into quite a few more years than originally anticipated. He was a man for whom faith, family and friendship were fundamental to his life, and during his illness, in palliative care, wrote an autobiography *A Life Shared*, in which he reflected on the priorities as he saw it in life.

The way in which he and Carole supported each other and their family (5 children and 15 grandchildren) through the difficulty and sadness of their loving daughter Majella's severe illness and death in 2020, in her early 50's, was an inspiration in how to deal with tragic adversity.

Their commitment to serving the broader community of the Church and beyond, came in many ways, just to mention their commitment to, and long-term involvement in Marriage Encounter and Retrouvaille for married couples, along with Antioch for Youth, among other things.

Marty reflected on "**Why I am Still a Catholic**". In his own words, from 2019 or thereabouts: "*I believe I was put on this earth for 3 primary reasons:*

1 To find someone to love and hopefully to love me - I cracked the mega-jackpot lottery... with Carole Mitchell as my best friend/life companion. Wife/lover/mother to our family and now incredible and patient carer.

2. To establish a connection and build a relationship with whatever concept of God/Creator/ Superior Being I could develop. I have done that mainly through the Catholic Church.

3. To develop a philosophy on life – basically what did important things and concepts mean to me, as in love, family, honesty, friends, religion, neighbours... These things I think I have done and am very much at peace as I face my questionable future living with IPF (idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis)."

He goes on to speak of the significance of the Sacraments in his life, with his marriage in particular, graced with "*passion, faithfulness, commitment, enthusiasm, generosity, and, as we get older, patience and acceptance.*" Then he focusses on **family, faith, integrity (wholeness, soundness) and honesty.**

As a mature, thinking, committed but questioning, and very experienced lifetime Catholic, he also had a great capacity to laugh at himself and see the funny side of life, even in adversity, as he continued to enjoy his living wake, or was it wakes, as he survived far longer than the initial dire prognosis. He knew how to have fun, and to enjoy life with family and friends all the way. We can learn much from such a person as my friend Marty, in living a full Christian life in the Catholic tradition!

Then back here on Friday, we had the funeral of Josie Rabar, born in Austria in 1946, whose life was hit by adversity all the way through, her Polish wartime refugee parents migrating to Australia, seeking a better life for themselves and their children. Another daughter died here at 12 months. She married Joe in 1967, moved to Essendon, their own daughter Julianne growing up and marrying here at St Therese's in 1994, but dying in 2000. Then Joe suffered from ill-health and died in 2007, followed by her mother and her sister Irene, Josie herself eventually suffering from a terminal illness herself, over the last few years, in care at Holloway.

Despite all of this, she maintained and was sustained by friendships with her neighbours and their families, with whom she developed deep and lasting relationships, which were mutually supportive, so that she was never left alone in the world, as she might well have felt at times.

We had the reading about a time for everything under the sun, from Ecclesiastes, Old Testament wisdom (converted into a top of the pops song by The Byrds in the 1960's as **Turn, Turn, Turn**, and got into **Forrest Gump** too!), about the complexity and unfairness of life at times. It certainly reflected her experience of the darker side of life, and yet, the positive and determined way in which she faced the losses and the grief in her life.

The point is that tragedy and suffering is not *God's Will*, which I see as that we make the most of life, use our free will and consciences well, for good, and love according to the way of Jesus. Josie's close friends and neighbours gave me a clear picture of a courageous and loving woman who gave so much of herself to others, and found her happiness and fulfilment in this way, despite so many tragic setbacks, particularly in her later adult life. She was said to be always there for others, and an attitude of "*I'm fine*", even during the last years of her own severe terminal illness.

Matthew's Beatitudes, the "*Sermon on the Mount*" was the Gospel chosen, and highlights the positive attitudes with which Jesus challenges the Christian disciple to live life. Luke's version of the "*Sermon on the Plain*", we hear today is much briefer, with the ensuing woes or warnings, thrown in as well, but the message is the same. I reiterate that Jesus nowhere lays down a list of rules and regulations, but rather points to attitudes which reflect an open heart to those in need and calls for a generosity of spirit and integrity in living the Christian life.

Luke's Beatitudes present Jesus as giving a timeless and universal message about generosity of spirit, sharing of personal resources, and responding to the needs of others. To the immediate group of apostles and hearers around him at the time, it could be assumed they really didn't have too much to share around, beyond providing for their own and their families' needs, but it is clear that Jesus proclaims a universal message about God's Kingdom being real in terms of applying the fundamental principles of love, peace and truth to the lives of believers, and beyond!

The Gospel message of love remains at the heart of it all, as we continue to follow the way of Jesus, responding to his call to hope and perseverance, in the generous and positive spirit of the Beatitudes, with all the unpredictability of life, however inadequate and downhearted we might feel at times.

john hannon

13th February 2022