

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR C HOMILY 2022
LOVE, THE SPIRIT AND PEACE

Jn 14.23-29

AA 15.1-2, 22-29

Apoc 22.12-20

As a preliminary moral exhortation, I hope you remembered to exercise your democratic right and obligation to vote in the Federal Election. If not, you're too late and you can expect the \$20 fine, which I think should be increased!

And so another week goes by as we approach winter and the shortest day. The clock ticks on, as life goes by. Yet my week has been a little different, as I've been spending time, sitting at the bedside one of my close priest friends, Eric Hodgens, at 86. As well as being a friend (*who lured me into snow skiing, with mixed results, but it was fun at the time!*), Eric has been something of a mentor and guide leading up to my popeless ordination in August 1978, and during the last 44 years of my ministry as a priest.

Since his fall out of bed in December, his condition has slowly declined, to the point where he is now incommunicative, with only a short time to live. It is sad to see, but part of life's reality, that our mortality catches up with us, and we're not here forever. Palliative care provides relief from pain, and comfort for those last days, the main aim being to let nature take its course, but with medical assistance to ease the process, particularly in regard to breathing difficulty and pain. Suffering in itself is not a good thing, and needs to be minimized. Masochism is unhealthy, physically, psychologically and spiritually.

Such is life, as Ned Kelly is reputed to have said, as his last words!

It is a sobering, distressing experience, and sad to see someone who was so assertive, independent, intelligent and insightful, in a helpless state. Eric has contributed so much to so many, by sharing and living his faith, in the various situations where he has been a parish priest, pastor in general, and educator. For many years, as well as being a parish priest, he directed pastoral formation of priests, organizing lectures, seminars and conferences, to provide further development in the diverse aspects of ministry, particularly in the fields of scripture, theology and pastoral practice.

Eric's life embodied "***Faith seeks understanding***", which has been a fundamental principal for growth, learning and development in living the Christian life from the start, as we hear from life in the early church communities, as reflected in Acts of the Apostles today.

We see hear the old story of human nature having difficulty dealing with change, and yet the impossibility of not avoiding change, often creates misunderstanding, resistance, confusion and resentment. At the same time, we can understand the reluctance of potential members to observe all the old Jewish requirements for joining up. We can identify here the need for an early process of conflict resolution.

Here are Paul and Barnabas being confronted by insistence by some of Jewish background demanding that circumcision be required of males expressing faith in Jesus and his message, in order to join the Christian community. Differences of opinion lead to arguments, and ultimately to the first Council of Jerusalem, where it was Paul who broadened Peter's scope, in focussing on the fundamental requirements for living as a Christian. Note that Paul calls for discussion of the matter, by consulting those already in the community, and that a sort of compromise is developed along the way, with the meat of strangled animals still taboo (*Perhaps for underlying hygiene and health reasons back then!*), and more understandably, fornication, as he puts it! We can't deny that fidelity in marriage has always been a positive value, and sustaining of a loving partnership, even though sometimes things can and do go wrong on that score!

And again, we are back to Jesus' lengthy farewell discourse, as he prepares the apostles to face the future, with faith and determination, despite what is about to befall him, as he is about to go into the darkness, yet continue into the light, through the tragedy, yet triumph of the Cross, as John perceives it. Jesus draws all to himself, as he is lifted up to return to the Father, whilst promising peace, and the enduring presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Once more, Brendan Byrne SJ sums it up: "***The community of believers will have a sense of his presence, even though as far as the rest of the world is concerned, he will be simply absent... Jesus stresses 3 things: love, the Paraclete (Spirit) and peace.***"

There is also sad news with the death of Caroline Jones at 84, a female pioneer in the media field, for whom there has been nothing but admiration expressed for her quality journalism and contribution to presenting objective truth, in a world where objectivity has often become more and more distorted to suit the opinion of the presenter. Did you know that she became a Catholic later in her adult life, perhaps as a side effect of her presentation of the “*Search for Meaning*” ABC radio series; she was also anchor of “*Four Corners*” and then “*Australian Story*” over many years. One book she wrote was titled: “*An authentic life: finding meaning and spirituality in everyday life*”, the sort of theme that certainly appeals to my philosophy and theology of life! Don’t we all find ourselves on that search, at whatever stage of life we find ourselves to be?

The Christian perspective fits in well with that search, as Jesus encourages his disciples, and so us, to respond to the Spirit, and to recognize his enduring presence in our world. Once again, it’s not a matter of looking skywards to the heavens, so much as looking around and seeing our role as his friends, and so disciples of service to others. We demonstrate his love in the way we strive for peace, actively love others as he loves us, so reflecting our love of the God of wonder and mystery, whom we cannot see, in our lives, yet revealed in the person of Jesus, in whom we believe.

john hannon

22nd May 2022

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