

**HOMILY 26th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021**  
**TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING, NOT JUDGEMENT AND EXCLUSION**  
*Mk 9.38-48      Num 11.25-29      James 3.16-4.3*

Welcome again to Mass on-line, now the 26<sup>th</sup> weekend of Ordinary Time, as we now have a hopeful *road map*, as a way forward to more freedom, but still with ongoing uncertainty for things to open up.

This past week, we've seen the dark, nasty, irrational and stupid side of human nature coming out with ignorant, aggressive and even violent, protesters, whose actions will only result in prolonging more lockdowns and spread of COVID. We can all understand and feel the frustration of lockdown, but it's not just about the individual, but the common good, and health and protection of all in our community, and our broader world as a global village.

Still, the numbers of infections still climbing in Victoria (847 and 1 death), and NSW (1007 and 11 deaths), this Saturday), so I strongly reiterate that you should get vaccinated as soon as you can, if you haven't been already, as it's really the only way out of this dire situation. I see it as a moral and social responsibility for all, except for those with medical exemptions.

Meanwhile, on a happier note that I continue on a double with Melbourne Demons into the AFL Grand Final for the first time in 21 years, aiming for a premiership for the first time since I was 11, and Melbourne Storm still up there so far in the NRL next week! I retain the Max Gawn whiskers for effect! Here's hoping!!

And so, once again, we gather virtually together, to pray together in spirit, as we continue the theme of Seasons of Creation, reminding us to appreciate the wide and wonderful world of which we are part.

This past week I have had 3 funerals, 2 of older women in their 90's, and one in her 60's, a few years younger than I, and whose elderly mother's funeral was only a little over 12 months ago. In each case, the younger generation of grandchildren shared loving memories of very good and selfless individuals, all of whom had left lasting legacies of precious memories and so much for which to be grateful. These were lives well-lived, with purpose and much love and lived faith.

Each reflected a deep sense of what living life well is about, focussed on love and service, to family, friends and community, doing the ordinary, simple things that count for so much, giving of themselves, and so finding happiness and fulfilment in doing so. In other words, living the Gospel of Jesus in very practical and simple ways is what life should be about, both within and beyond family life and involvement.

As one example, Marie, who lived to 96, mother of 4, nana of 14 and great nana of 15+1, for example, had been a volunteer Red Cross driver for 30 years, until she was 80, reluctant even then, to stop her friendly and generous service. She was described as a faithful Catholic, who moved with the times, and was so willing to embrace the more open approach of Vatican II, her son Andrew stating in his videoed eulogy from Sydney: "*She welcomed the breakdown of sectarian barriers and was happy to embrace the wider world.*" In fact, the very word *catholic* means inclusive and universal!

Today's theme relates to broadening our scope, and view of others. So often, in human history, right up to today, it has been easy enough to *demonize* (so to speak), or dehumanize, those who are different. There seems to be a natural tendency in all of us to remain within our own little group, comfortable with where we are and who we are with, and not keen or willing to move beyond that situation.

The first reading about those chaps Medad and Eldad (reminding me of that Pakistani cricketer Miandad), seems a strange choice, but in fact, it presents an image of Moses being understanding and accepting of those offering a positive and authentic prophetic message of reform, even though not officially registered along the normal lines of authority. Likewise, we have Jesus rebuking the apostles complaining about those outside their group taking it upon themselves to drive out demons (not to refer to my AFL team, especially this weekend!) as evil spirits, as if Jesus and his followers had the exclusive mission and sole moral authority to do so.

Scholars suggest that this self-righteous attitude may well have also existed in the early church communities, where some were starting to lay a claim to have sole rights over deciding and directing what Jesus' followers should be doing. The result, then, would be that anyone else should be excluded from the group or at least restricted from taking responsibility for doing good among themselves. It was as if the only recognized good deeds could be done by those who conformed to group expectations from within.

As Frank Moloney SDB puts it: *"Jesus' message on service and receptivity (of others) seems to have made little impact on the disciples... They still see the kingdom as a power structure along the lines of a political kingdom... Basic goodness for Christian motives leads to the kingdom."*

These insular attitudes could only restrict broader service and lead the *in* group to turn in on themselves, rather than look outwards to the broader world and need for social activity and service there. Moreover, there is also the danger of expelling those who don't seem to fit in or where there is an unforgiving attitude to those who transgress, without allowing for repentance and another chance. So often, the Gospel message has been lost along the way, with enforcement and exclusion as the practice, rather than forgiveness, welcome and love, as key elements in the Gospel preached and practised by Jesus.

The dangers of fundamentalism were further revealed this week, with the Afghani Taliban chief enforcer of Shariah Law, with its harsh and extremely inhumane interpretation, such that executions and amputations of hands would resume for offenders, with the possible concession they mightn't be carried out in public!! His claim is that stability and safety can thus be restored to people throughout the country. It is a frightening and horrifying scenario, added to the suppression of woman and human rights in general.

By contrast, in the Gospel, we have Jesus speaking in extreme terms in warning against sin, with an offending arm or eye to be removed, but let's remember this is purely a symbolic reminder of the body, as a metaphor for the community, being used to remind believing disciples of their responsibility to resist temptation to evil, and so avoid sin.

And so, the ultimate message for today, is well expressed by Brendan Byrne SJ, who reflects on the balance needed between recognizing the possibility of goodness outside the community of disciples, and also within:

*"Taken together, both elements of instruction on the part of Jesus show a remarkable openness to the possibility of goodness and effective ministry outside the community of disciples strictly so defined. They invite the disciples to look away from their own sense of distinctiveness and privilege and to be prepared to find and rejoice in goodness wherever it exists... What is supremely important about such belonging is preparedness for costly service rather than resting on privilege and power."*

And there is always the possibility of evil existing within a community, even if called *christian*, and this must be rigorously and vigorously countered.

***So, let us rejoice in recognizing and doing what is good, resisting and rejecting what is evil, and so continue to live our faith in goodness and service.***

*john hannon*

*26<sup>th</sup> September 2021*

***SUNDAY UPDATE: Melbourne Demons Premiers for 2021, 57 years after their last premiership!!***

***From "Go Demons" to "Demons Rule"!!***