

Homily – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A) – 16 July 2017

Fr. Kevin Dillon

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By and large I would consider myself a reasonably law abiding citizen, civil disobedience is not something I venture into all that much, I haven't had too many speeding tickets, none in the last few years I must say, parking tickets, a few here and there but by and large I've been pretty good I think.

I nearly engaged in a major act of civil disobedience last year with the Census and I'm trying to remember but I think it was only at the last minute I eventually filled it out online. Do you remember when I all fell apart and the computers all failed and then immediately they came out with all these threats for what was going to happen to you if you didn't fill it in 'for goodness sake' but I was really snitchy on it for a while but eventually gave in and I sent mine in. I filled it in so I didn't get fined and didn't get on the register of people to be suspicious of or whatever.

It was interesting in recent times and there's been a lot of comment about this in the papers and television discussions and so on and lots of things on blogs about the fact that the fastest growing Religion, according to the Census, is '*no Religion*', that nearly a third of Australian people ticked the box saying '*no Religion*' in the Census and it's been fascinating to look at the different interpretations of what that means. In the long run no one is quite sure on the one hand you could have someone who ticked '*no Religion*' because they say '*I don't believe in God*', someone else might tick '*no Religion*' to say '*I believe in God and I pray but I've never belonged to any Church so I don't belong in any category, I'm not a Catholic, I'm not a Uniting Church, I'm not an Anglican or Baptist or whatever*', so they tick '*no Religion*' because they're not quite sure where they belong but it doesn't say that they don't have any '*Faith*'.

Someone else might have ticked '*no Religion*' to say '*well I was Baptised as a Catholic, I was brought up a Catholic, I went to a Catholic School but I'm pretty cheesed off with the Church for any number of reasons at the moment and I don't belong and I don't go so what the heck, 'no Religion' I don't belong to them practically. They haven't seen me for some years and unless they smarten their footwork they probably won't see me for a long time to come*', so they tick '*no Religion*'. All of those interpretations and many more can be taken on the fact that someone has ticked that box or clicked that box on the Electronic Census.

What it does mean though however if we're really open about it is that the whole religious framework of our society which has been very much part of our culture, our history, our whole practice of what we do and how we are, particularly our laws, it's nowhere near as strong as it used to be and from the perspective I suppose of '*if we value our Faith which brings us here together within the context of Mass*' well we're not as influential in taking the

Gospel message as far afield as we wanted to, as we used to and it can be somewhat demoralising especially within the context of the family where there are so many circumstances, there are grand-parents whose Faith has been so important to them, children switched off maybe a few years ago and now adult children and grand-children who may or may not even be Baptised.

So the story goes on, you're familiar with it and so am I and *'yeah it can be somewhat demoralising'* because it's a bit like if we go to the football and there's no one there except us it doesn't feel the same because people have switched off if they're being beaten every week although this year it's anybody's guess what might happen but we do gather strength for lots of things including our Faith by the degree to which others will share it around us.

One of the things that happens of course is that when people put aside their sense of belief in God and in a Divine Power and in an Authority bigger than us well for some people, certainly not for all but for some people it does bring in with it a degree of non-accountability, *'so if there's no God there's no Judgment', 'if there's no judgment well we can sort of do what we like'*. Now not everybody does that by any means, lots of people who don't have a Religious Faith or a Religious connection are extremely upright and have a great sense of humanity and integrity and personal morality and they could run rings around sometimes people who do have or profess to have a Religious Faith.

Overall across the spectrum of time a sense of a Religious Faith has been something that's been pretty important in our history and society and culture. It's within that context that we listen today to Jesus talking about the *'Sower and the Seed'* and it's quite fascinating when you think that this is a Parable that Jesus told two thousand years ago and the fascinating thing is that he talks about *'the Seed being the seed of the Faith of the Word of God'* and it's the same Seed but what makes the difference in terms of what happens is where it goes where it falls, so we have the Analogy of the *'Rocky Ground and the Shallow Ground and the Thorns and also the Good Soil where it's able to grow and thrive'*.

So what are we, what are we individually, what are we totally as a society, what are we? You might say 'well, probably as a society we're probably with the Thorns, too many distractions, too many things falling apart, too many things that have supported us over the years that are just no longer there and it's all very isolating and it's a bit lonely out there'.

We could also look at Shallow Ground where perhaps we're going along because everything's fine, we have air conditioning and we have transport and we have a great medical system so we don't really need God all that much because we live in a society where everything is terrific, but what happens when that's removed in some shape or form, what happens when whether it's our health or the health of others and our vulnerability is driven home to us and we realise 'hey we haven't got this life all tied up quite as effectively as we thought'.

A year or so ago there was a film released called *'Deepwater Horizon'* and it was a fascinating film because it was almost really a documentary of the Oil Rig in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 which caught fire and exploded with a loss of eleven lives, about a hundred and sixteen survivors of people who worked on the Oil Rig, extremely dramatic and the biggest oil spill the World has ever known and it was only seven years ago. The movie is fascinating because it uses real names, real circumstances and real events, not just in the sense that the Oil Rig exploded and burnt and let go all that Oil into the Oceans in that area and for a long way through much of that area, not just in that but in the detail, like the characters are the real people, they're the real names of people, they tried to stay as close to a documentary as possible even though it's acted and scripted.

What fascinated me when I saw it, I watched it over about five nights a few minutes at a time and right at the end when those who have been rescued which thank God was the majority of them, are on the deck of the rescue ship called I think *'The Bankston'* you see the Oil Rig ablaze in the background and they kneel down, everyone of them without exception and this is a real event that actually happened this is not the script writers imagination but all these people who just moments before were literally in fear of their lives, kneel down and say together *'The Lord's Prayer'*. It's a very moving part of the film, I saw one comment which said *'they do it in honour of their dead comrades and colleagues'* but one would imagine very much part of it *'it was in whatever way they knew God in their life, it was a prayer of thanksgiving that somehow they were able to go home to their families, to their loved ones, to be able to get up the next day while ten percent of those who had been working with them just hours earlier were dead in the most awful circumstances'*.

One wonders looking at that scene as it was dramatically and graphically presented as a real event that happened after that terrible industrial destruction of how many of those maybe at a Census before who knelt down and said *'The Lord's Prayer'* as best they could, how many of those might have ticked *'no Religion'* in the previous Census in the US, I have no idea it could have been one, it could have been ten, it could have been fifty, who knows but there was something there within the context of that terrible disaster that they had just somehow escaped that said *'Life is bigger than just me, somehow or other I look around and here's this huge oil rig ablaze in the night sky'* and they say *'I've got to give thanks to someone in whatever way I know'*.

It's a very moving scene, a very telling scene in terms of *'what is there below'* and we go back to the *'Sower and the Seed'*, the Soil can change, the dry soil can be watered, the Thorns can be removed and in different circumstances the capacity of the Seed to grow can be enhanced and enriched and that's why we don't lose hope. Sure we can look at those figures in the Census and say *'Oh it's all going downhill and it's going to get worse and there's all sorts of legislation coming in that's totally foreign to Christian practice and teaching and so on'* and all of that's true *but does that mean we lose hope, no it doesn't because the Seed's still good, the Seed is still fine our mission, should we accept it, is to do*

our best to somehow make that Soil more receptive, how we do that, well it depends where we are and who we're with but it can be done, things can change, the sense of recognition of the Power and the Love and the Providence of God is still there deep down within most human hearts and who knows what circumstances can arise to draw it out, what we've got to do is to be on the lookout for it, to nurture it and make it more fruitful with God's Grace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.
