

Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 11.10.20

I guess weddings can be, well when we used to have them, they've been banned for a while now haven't they. Anyway, when we used to have weddings and hopefully we'll get them back again, they prove to be in the main both joyous and nerve-racking occasions for those arranging them. Yep, happy occasion and everybody gets together and so on but there is a bit of a downside along the way if you're arranging them. Who do you invite, and very importantly, who don't you invite. Who almost makes the list but not quite? And then even once all of that has been sorted out, the big difficulty for those arranging it, whether it's the bride and groom or the bride's parents or whoever it might be- who do you sit next to who? Who sits on the same table? "You can't put them with them, there'll be an absolute ruckus, the place will fall apart etc etc". And so it goes on.

The difficulties of weddings are not restricted only to those who make the arrangements for it. Getting an invitation to a wedding or specific birthday or special celebration, or wedding anniversary or whatever it might happen to be. As a recipient it can be a little tricky. And that's really the focus of what Jesus is talking about in this Gospel today. Which is similar to last week's in the sense of invitations being sent and not accepted. So when you get an invitation to a wedding, do you say "oh, terrific! We've got an invitation to the wedding! Isn't that good." Only trouble is, they live in Queensland and that's where the wedding is and we live in Victoria. Now put aside the fact that you can't go anywhere in Victoria at the moment, even under the usual circumstances. "Oh we've got an invitation to the wedding, it's going to cost us a fortune! Gotta get the plane tickets, or it'll take us 5 days to drive there and back. And where do we stay, in motels and petrol..." and all sorts of different things.

And then there's the question of well do we do a gift? How much do we spend, it's costing us a fortune just to go! Do we have to buy an expensive gift? And what sort of gift will we get? And our brother and sister-in-law are going and what are they going to take? Is their gift going to be more expensive than ours? And so the list of challenges goes on. And then again, who sits next to who, are we going to meet people that we don't really want to meet, are we going to see people that we just can't stand? Etc etc. So will we accept the invitation, or will we say, "somehow Australia Post messed it up, you know they're all busy with parcels these days. Ours must've got lost in the mail. Sorry, we would've come if we'd received it, but we didn't get it!" And so it goes on.

Jesus was telling this little story 2000 years ago, but it's still very much relevant for us today. The whole question of invitations that we receive and how we respond to them. I guess every time I see this Gospel that comes up every few years, and I think of invitations I've received. Some of which I've accepted, some of which I haven't. I don't just mean to events, but in other areas of life. And I know I've probably told this story before but not for a while. But when I was working prior to my ordination, I was working at St Vincent's Hospital, while I was in the seminary as a student. And one of my fellow orderlies, who was a member of the Stella Maris club or the Apostleship of the Sea, in their club in Little Collins St that used to look after seafarers that came from overseas on cargo ships and so on, and were very good to them and still are and still operating.

But he was at me all the time to come and meet the Chaplain. And the Chaplain's name was not unlike my own, his name was Fr. Kevin Quinlin, he had been an assistant priest just up the road from where I am now at Rowville, he was at Ferntree Gully. And he became eventually Chaplain to the seafarers. And he was a most impressive man indeed, but this fellow orderly whose name was Felix, as in Felix the cat as some of you may remember from those comic strips. And Felix said you must come down and meet Fr. Quinlin to the Stella Maris club. And I'd say he would've asked me almost every day for about 5 or 6 weeks. And eventually, just to keep him quiet, and I suppose to be polite, I was a polite person in those days, I went to the Stella Maris club and I met this priest. And accepting that invitation, albeit reluctantly, was a decision that changed my life.

And if I hadn't accepted that invitation, well I know I wouldn't be standing here. I probably wouldn't have been a priest. Because the invitation came at a time when I was just a bit not quite sure whether I would continue on in my studies or not. But meeting that priest, probably the most singularly inspirational person I've ever met, made all the difference. Not because he said anything to me, not because he told me anything that was special, but just his personal example. And I thought, if that's what being a priest is all about, this is worth hanging in for.

So I hung in for another 4 years in the seminary, and then another 51 afterwards, still hanging in. But, that was an invitation, and it was one that I accepted which has made an enormous difference to my life and hopefully in positive ways a few people along the way as well. So it prompts us maybe today to look into our own minds and hearts. While we've got a bit of time and while we can't go out much, we can go for walks that's something to think about. And say well okay, where have been the invitations that God has sent me. There's no doubt in my mind that Felix was the one who said come down and meet Fr. Quinlin. Absolutely no doubt in my mind whatsoever that he was the instrument of the Lord Himself. The right person, at the right time, in the right situation, to issue that invitation to me. And he did! So, what about you? What invitations has God issued to you? What are the ones you've accepted, and you say gee I'm glad I did that. What are the ones that you let go by, and afterwards you thought I should not have done that. I shouldn't have blamed Australia Post that I didn't get the invitation. Oh yes we did, we were too busy doing other things, just like the story in the Gospel.

So it's room for thought, not to beat ourselves up over what's been in the past, but rather to see some of the invitations that come to us and that some can be quite bleak. I can remember once, seeing a fellow who didn't seem to be having much luck trying to change a tire by the side of the road, and I was able to stop and give him a hand. But as it turned out, he was able to offer me some information because of what he did which made a very big difference for me at the time. If I hadn't accepted the invitation to give that guy a hand, I would never have got that information I needed, and so it goes on. There are endless stories like that, but maybe today have a think and pray about what are my invitations? What are the ones that God has sent me, and very importantly, what are the ones he might send me in the future.

And maybe, within what we're doing at the moment and managing, is there in the broad sense of the word, some sort of invitation in what we're experiencing, to put our lives in order a little bit more. Many of us have maybe used this time to clean up a few things, tidy up the garage, polish the car, clean out the rubbish from the boot of the car etc etc. But every year the Church puts aside 6 weeks of Lent, to do that sort of thing spiritually as well. But maybe there's an opportunity at the moment to put our lives in order. We might say well it's awful because I haven't been able to talk to Aunty Mary for 6 months or haven't been able to see her for ages and ages and I miss her cos she's been an important part of my life and so on. Well yeah, but did we think of her on those terms when we were able to see her. Do we take the opportunities to have personal contact with Aunty Mary when we were able to do so.

So amidst all the difficulty and the heartache, and sometimes the trauma of what we're going through with the Covid 19 crisis, maybe there is also some sort of invitation hidden there. To make use of this, dare I use the word, unprecedented circumstances in order to try and take onboard the message, the invitation, that God Himself might be offering us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.