

## FR. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY DATED 10.01.2021

There's something happening probably really all over the world, irrespective of Covid restrictions. Maybe a little bit limited like so many other things at the moment but it's still happening because it's early January and certainly in this part of the world where our sort of scholastic year, school year runs along the calendar year as well and that is that there are a lot of young people, some may be still at school but they are entering into maybe Year 11 or 12 or maybe they've left school and they've gone to university or some institute and what's in common of course, they're starting a new job. Maybe starting their first job. Might be part time at Maccas or whatever, it might be starting a trade, it might be having done some university studies and so on, that they've been able to secure some employment hoping that what they've studied for is what's going to be their life's work but aware that often that's not the way it works out.

I think of that at this time because today's Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, it's not just about baptism or our baptism. It's because it's an emergence of Jesus into a different kind of workforce. He already had a job of course. He was a carpenter and I presume it was probably a pretty good one. So it's not exactly his entry into the workforce, that's recognized in the baptism feast that we celebrate today but it is the beginning of this public ministry into which he operated and it's maybe something. As so many people around us and most of us will know young people who are emerging into their first work, to acknowledge what an extraordinary experience that can be and indeed it can be quite a life changing thing. Certainly was for Jesus. One thing to be a carpenter in a small village, another thing to be the saviour, a wandering preacher, a miracle worker, toasted the town one day and hounded out of another town the next.

You know for all the extraordinary experiences that happened to Jesus in those three years, following the event that we commemorate today of his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan, it prompts us to think about the importance of work and especially being part of a workforce in our own life. It's something which, well, for some of us, it goes back a long way and maybe the impact is dimmed a bit, which is a pity, because those early days in the workforce, is very much a formative part of who we are.

They are a way in which God in his wisdom looks upon us in a way in which he looked down on Jesus emerging from the waters of his baptism and said, this is my son in whom I am well pleased and commissioned others to listen to him.

So maybe today, we might just think back on that. I was reflecting and it's not meant to be about me but I'll tell you a little about my early jobs because they were very formative and as I do my little piece of reflection, maybe you can do yours on what you did.

My first job was when I was still at school and I went to work at the men's wear department of Buckley and Nunn in Bourke Street, now known as David Jones – doing it pretty hard in the retail issue at the moment. It pays a few more David Jones stores not doing all that well like many other stores but in those days, it was certainly thriving, not because I was there, I was only in my last three years of high school at the time and it was my first venturing into having to get up and be at a certain place, having to dress appropriately, having to look at the hierarchy, if you might look at that of the workplace but most of the acknowledgment

of people who were coming in, looking for this and looking for that.

My most memorable sale was to sell a pair of men's braces to Mrs. Bolte who was the wife of the then Premier Vic later on – Sir Henry Bolte. That's the things that you remember but she as a very gracious lady as I recall. I hope the braces fitted Henry alright. But anyhow was, one of the things we were told by the people in charge of the department was often the heard phrase "the customer is always right."

Well, we found the customer was usually right but when you're a kid of 15 working and you're the sort of lowest rank of the hierarchy, you know that the customer was always right but it was a thing of respect for the general public within the context of the work that had to be done and accepting the fact that when you're starting off, you've got to be prepared to sweet the floor and put up with people who are unreasonable and all the rest of it. Good training for someone who's to become a priest, I can tell you.

So that was the first job. Five pounds four and six I got paid for that. Then I went on the seminary and we had three months holiday in the seminary which were not spent basking on beaches at Portsea or Sorrento though. Mainly used to be in the workforce and in many ways, no disrespect to the Jesuit priests who taught me in the seminary but in many ways, I think I learned more in that workforce about life and to a degree about priesthood than even while I was in the seminary itself because this is the field in which I was supposed to work.

In my first four years outside the seminary, I worked for two months at a time, called the Victorian Titles Office and I was in the public service and I learned a lot of things there too. One was that the fact that many jobs, maybe most jobs can be pretty boring but if you want to have a pay check at the end of it, you've just got to do it. And this was a matter of filling out pieces of paper which somebody else would type up well before computers came along but there were always different lights at the end of the tunnel and different interesting people that we would meet, particularly in the workforce itself.

Fellow workers I shared a desk with, a fellow called Ian Meldrum, who was now known far and wide as Molly Meldrum and he was a law student at that time. I vividly remember we were filling out these forms that had to be put under titles and we would draft what had to be put there and he's passed these papers over to me, he said, have a look at this and it was a fellow called John Christmas, was the fellow's name and he was marrying a lady, shall we say, Joan Harrison – I'm just making that up but he said, look at this, he said. They're getting married, buying a block of land together, a house together but look at the name "Christmas". I've never seen that before, he said. Can you imagine if in fact, his fiancée, her name instead of being Joan, it was Mary. When they got married, she'd become "Mary Christmas" and he said, if they're one of your mob and they are Catholics and they had a son and he went on to be a priest, he'd be Father Christmas.

So, he was quite a character in those days. The old Molly and still is of course. That's absolutely true story. So that was the Title's Office or T.O. as we called it.

Then I went on to something a bit more dramatic and I went to work as an orderly at St. Vincent's Hospital and that could be quite dramatic, particularly in the emergency area

where you knew what was going to happen but it's there maybe that I found this was the sliding entrée into my ministry as a people who were vulnerable, people who were scared, people who were relying on me for goodness sake to talk to and maybe in particular in casualty or emergency as it's called now, in the small hours of the night because there's no one else to talk to and it was almost like my preview of listening to confessions, for goodness sake. So it's quite an extraordinary job when my very last week in that job was about the middle of January in 1969 when people who had been burnt in the Lara bushfires were brought in. It was unbelievable, the fire jumped the Geelong Road and people were caught in their cars and many of them were badly burnt and some died on the day and others died from quite some time after because of the infections that occurred as a result.

But again, that job taught me of how quickly things can change. Taught me how scared people can be from all sorts of things in their life and rightly so. And these were things that were all in my first jobs.

And maybe today, as we are thinking of Jesus, going to his yeah, not technically speaking not his first job but the beginning of his public ministry, his ministry to people, we might look back on our own experiences and say, well, what were they? What did I learn from them? What was God showing me? That's what I find when I look back. God was showing me things in each of those jobs – whether it was the customer is always right in the hierarchy of the workplace, whether it was often the drudgery of a workplace, same thing day after day after day, or whether it is that vulnerability of human need and people being scared in any number of different circumstances. These are some of the lessons I learned which I found as I moved into my public ministry in 1970, after ordination in 69. These are the things I know had prepared me for these things. So maybe God sends us messages in the workplace. We don't often think of that. We think of it as just earning a living and it's also the messages that we take on board from those around us from the jobs themselves, the people we meet and work with and particularly, if we have anything to do with the public, that service to which we are all called and that's what Jesus did, he has learned in his work at Nazareth as a carpenter, the importance of many people and so on the fact that he subjected himself to work – w-o-r-k. Just like the rest of us is so precious because it shows that God is with us, we talked about that with Emmanuel, over the Advent Christmas time but he's very much with us, within the context of our own work experience.

So maybe, in union with Jesus, beginning his work in his public ministry, we might think back to those early jobs of our own and say well, what did God teach me? Maybe he taught us the hard way. Maybe he taught us a soft and gentle way but certainly there was something there for us to learn from and to take into what our ministry is, whatever it might be, into today and tomorrow.

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