

Fr. KEVIN DILLON'S HOMILY 12/09/21 – 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Broadly speaking, it seems that every 20 years or thereabouts, things happen that have enormous consequences for us, across the globe and individually. Lessons to be learnt, things to be pondered and so on. The back of 1920, this is broadly speaking, and we've got the aftermath of WW1 with all its terrible destruction. And as we learnt a little bit more in more recent times, Spanish flu. 1940s, WWII was beginning and Pearl Harbour and Nazi Germany and the fall of Poland and all the things that went with that. The 60s, I guess the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and so many other elements that came in at that time. The hippie culture, the Vietnam war and so on, which changed the world. The 80s, probably the Cold War, Chernobyl obviously key thing in terms of where we were heading, and scientific discoveries.

Jump to our own times of course, 2020- now what could've happened in 2020? Well, we know all about that one. And jump back of course to the early 2000s, and we've got an event which, I've often wondered actually over time, it's certainly struck me in an enormous way, maybe not you, but it did me. On September the 11th, 2001, I was in my first year at Geelong at the time. And I was going to go to bed, on that night, and it was about 11:30, 11:40. And my radio was on 3AW as it always is, I was listening to Bruce and Phil who did the night line program at the time. And heard them talking about the World Trade Centre, and the news of the attack had just come through. When I first heard about it, I thought it was one of those flashbacks that they often do on that program, and it was going back to the attack in 1994 that had been made on the World Trade Centre. And then I realised as they were speaking, no this is happening as we speak. So I walked out of my bedroom and into my office and turned on the TV, and sat there for the next 3.5 hours until about 3:00 in the morning.

And so I look at myself and think why this has affected me the way it did, because I watched as it happened, the collapse of both towers. Watching it as it happens is different to watching filmed events later on, even just a few hours after or the next morning. And especially to realise the number of people who were being effected by that, the number of people dying. Injured, lives transformed for life, any number of different effects. But, even in watching that, never did I think that it would have the ongoing widespread effect in terms of the war in Afghanistan which has only in recent weeks taken another turn. Hasn't really finished, probably will never finish in its own way. But on this 20th anniversary, it seems to me that all of us, we do have an opportunity to reflect on some aspects of that. And I just wanted to put three things to you, three little lessons, it could be 33. 3 little messages that I think are there for us all, and make a difference in our life. As the weekend there will be lots of media coverage of all of this because of the 20th anniversary, and maybe especially it being on the weekend, where we've got a bit more time to read or watch than we might have during the course of the week. And still negotiating that happening of our own time, with people going to be look back on COVID over many years to come.

But what I'm going to ask you to do, or suggest that you can do, because all of you are watching this online, there are three little video clips attached to this. I'd ask you to consider watching, two of them, even as we go. For this one week only, you are allowed to stop in the Homily, and click back to the website and click in the appropriate clip, and watch it in full. That's one of the great things which we can do, you can watch it and keep it and watch it again or whatever. But the first clip is from a movie, I have spoken about it before, it's one of the most powerful films I've ever seen. It's magnificently acted by Tom Hanks who never makes a bad movie, Sandra Bullock, who rarely makes a bad movie, and a young actor at the

time who I think this is the only movie he's ever made. But he was amazing, his name is Tom Horn. But the name of the movie, and I checked- I think it's only available on YouTube at the moment. 'Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close' is the movie, and if you can't get it, let me know I've got a DVD of it. A stunning film connected with the September 11 attacks and the collapse of the towers. And young Tom Horn, he's about 14 years old and suffers from Aspergers, he's just a bit different, but a nice kid. And he loses his dad in the collapse of one of the towers, and I think it was the south tower.

And this clip shows him going home, they've been sent home from school because they know the attacks have been made on the World Trade Centre, and he's in New York. And the phone goes, and something tells him that it's his dad ringing from the World Trade Centre. And he can't bring himself to answer it. It's the most, for me anyhow, one of the most incredibly moving pieces of cinema I've ever seen. And watch it for yourself, and for those maybe who can't watch it for those listening on radio, at the end the phone goes dead. And the film shows in the background, the tower collapsing. And he realises, this young fella, what has happened, and he knows it must have been his dad on the other end, and he just collapses to the floor himself. And he carries that with him, and it's told actually to a counsellor, to a psychologist. He said I've never told this to anyone, never told his mum and he's an only child.

But some might say yes very moving etc etc. But what do we get out of it. What we get out of it is a thing called a gut feeling. Sometimes we are in situations where we know what we should do. There is something within us which we only describe in that strange phase as a gut feeling. We know what we ought to be doing, but somehow we cannot muster the strength to do it. And in this extraordinarily powerful little clip, only for 3 or 4 minutes, to say maybe those gut feelings are things we should follow. Even when it takes an enormous amount of courage to do so, we know what we ought to do, and we pray to God to give us the strength to do what we have to do. That's one clip.

The second clip is an extraordinary song which was written shortly after the September 11 attacks. But it's summed up so much of what is learnt and even all these years later, the thoughts within it where things happen and we are meant to take onboard the things that are really important in our life. I mentioned to you where I was during those attacks that night, and I watched it for nearly three hours, and just couldn't believe what I was seeing. It's one of those 'where were you when you heard the news' situations that we often have. And the song itself, and yes I know, he's a country singer, an extremely gifted and talented one though, Alan Jackson. He wrote this song which became in many ways, not an anthem, but something that summed up the thoughts, not just of one nation, this was a world event and it touched us all round the world.

'Where were you when the world stopped turning? Did you weep for the children who lost their dear loved ones? Pray for the ones who don't know. Did you rejoice for the people who walked from the rubble, and sob for the ones left below. I'm just a singer of simple songs, I'm not a political man. I watch CNN, but I'm not sure I can tell you the difference between Iraq and Iran. But I know Jesus, and I talk to God, and I remember this from when I was young. Faith, hope and love are some good things He gave us, and the greatest is love. Where were you when the world stopped turning on that September day? Teaching a class full of innocent children (which is where the president was when he heard the news), or driving down some cold interstate. Did you feel guilty when you heard the news, did you feel guilty because you're a survivor? In a crowded room, did you feel alone, did you call up your mother and tell her you loved her? Did you dust off that Bible at home?

Did you open your eyes and hoped it never happened, closed your eyes but not go to sleep. Did you notice the sunset for the first time in ages, or speak to some stranger on the street. Did you lay down at night and think of tomorrow, did you go out and buy you a gun. Did you turn off that violent old movie you're watching and turn on I Love Lucy reruns. Did you go to a church and hold hands with some stranger, stand in line and give your own blood. Did you just stay home and cling tight to your family, and thank God you had somebody to love.' That's the core of the lyrics of the song that somehow said so much in terms of how the world can change in an instant, the whole world. And we can be forced to think of what's really important, in terms of family, why some people died and why some people didn't. And have a look at that and have a listen to it, and recognise the depth of those lyrics which really are a message to us all on this occasion 20 years on.

The third clip is one which I'd put a warning, it's a harrowing clip. It's again from a movie called United 93 which is the story made by a very brilliant filmmaker called Paul Greengrass. And it's the story of the 1 plane that did not reach its target on that day. It was taken over, but still crashed, but taken over by passengers and its target it appeared would have been either the White House or The Capitol in Washington. And the passengers, by their own courage, saved that from happening and gave their own lives for that. As I say it's harrowing stuff, and you might not want to watch it. If you feel you don't want to watch it, don't watch it, because it's real story. But it's a story of the capacity of the human spirit to do some great things. To do some wonderful things, they just got on the plane to go to Washington that day, no idea of what was going to be asked of them within half an hour of the flight taking off. And yet they've summoned within themselves, the sense of 'somebody's got to do something, we're here, we'll do what we can'. And enormous courage, has it been shown in other places, of course it has, in any number of other areas, and maybe at another time when we're very conscious of the fact of weaknesses and the world's a mess and so on. To recognise that the human spirit that we all share, is still capable of great selflessness, of great courage, of wonderful deeds, of total self-giving. All the things that the Gospel is all about. During the week we had the Gospel calling us to generosity, and you can have no greater love than to give your life for another.

And so have a look at this, it's the end of the movie, the actual just 5 minutes or so to take over flight 93. But, harrowing, don't watch it if you're not up to it. If you watch the first 2 you mightn't be up to it. But nonetheless, the other lesson we get is that sense of, well the first is obeying your gut and know you've gotta do something. The second is to maybe go and put priorities in order. Maybe in terms of family, and take notice of the sunsets, and the good things that are there in life. And the third is to believe in the nobility of the human spirit that God has given us. We are made, for all our faults, we are still in the image and likeness of God. And it's in any number of different circumstances where we can read, not necessarily they don't need enough of the good things of life, of the good people in life. But to recognise that within us, there are the capacity for great and unselfish things, and there are examples given any day, and every day. But maybe on a day when we remember the world stopping turning some 20 years ago, we can reflect on those things and be the better for that reflection.

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