

Homily 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A 5th November 2017

My old boss at university Prof Mick Wilson used to say: The trouble with climbing the corporate ladder is when you get to the top you discover the ladder is against the wrong wall. We live in a society drunk on success. How is that success measured? By our status, by where we live, what car we drive, our position at work, how many people work for us? Our society sees itself as a pyramid and the closer you are to the top the more power and status you have, the more successful you are. Yet we worry about the cost of electricity and gas. Newspapers talk about looming blackouts this summer and speculate on an energy crisis. This seems totally unbelievable for a country that has abundant sources of energy, both renewable and non-renewable. We are the second biggest exporter of natural gas, yet people struggle to pay their gas bill. We are reminded constantly that the price of energy along with the price of houses etc. is a product of the market. Yet families struggle to meet the cost of living and housing affordability seems like a perverse joke. Why? I ask myself.

As I ponder today's readings and think of these issues; I'm drawn back to a conversation while on holiday with

Kaye in the Kimberley, WA. I had taken a helicopter ride over the Bungle Bungle Range. A guide called Jimmy picked me up from the ride to take me back to our accommodation. As we drove Jimmy started to tell me about the dreaming of his people the traditional owners of the land. He explained how this dreaming had allowed his people to inhabit this country for 20,000 years. The dreaming covered every aspect of life from the size of a family unit, to what animals to hunt and where, and what to do in what season. As he drove along Jimmy said to me: You know, our dreaming is like your Bible, it tells us where we come from, our history and how to live in our country. But as I reflect on the state of our society and Jimmy's words I wonder if in the distant future someone will be able to say this Bible has allow us to live in this land for 20,000 years. If this is to happen there are two ideas in today's readings we need to reclaim; the accountability of leadership and servant-leadership. I short our society will need to embrace love and humility.

In the first reading the prophet Malachi is greatly concerned with his people's rejection of God. Malachi attributes his people's rejection of God to the poor leadership shown by the priests who have profaned the

covenant of Levi, the first of the high priests. The prophet warns the priests that God will make them contemptible and vile in the sight of the people. Why; because, they had sinned against God by showing partiality in their administration. In short they were a bunch of crooks. In Malachi's time the people had lost their sense of equality and a ruling class of priests emerged. The gap between the haves and the have-nots widened and as it did the ruling class acquired more property and power. With the accumulation of power the ruling class exploited ordinary folk even more taking what little property they had and selling into slavery those who could not pay their debts. The sin of the priest was one of social injustice. They, the descendants of Levi, who derived their power from the covenant between God and His people, had defiled that covenant. The priest had defiled the covenant by exploiting the people, the people they were meant to care for. Their sin was not against a particular law. Their sin was failing to love God's people as God loved them. Later Jesus would say in John's Gospel "Love one another as I have loved you". As I write this I wonder what Malachi would say to a bank that made a profit of some \$6 Billion yet plans to make 6000 of its workers redundant.

How should we treat those we are responsible for? In one of the most beautiful lines from Paul, Paul says: “Like a mother feeding and looking after her children.” In this simple sentence Paul captures the essence of love and humility. The love of a mother knows no bounds she will humbly give her all for her child. How many times have you seen on the news a mother crying outside a courtroom after her child has been found guilty of some heinous crime. Great love requires great humility because love demands that we put the other first as Matthew says: “The greatest among you must be your servant”. In today’s Gospel we are called to great love; we are called to great humility; we are called to servant leadership.

A style of leadership exemplified by Pope Francis, who when elected Pope rejected the normal trappings of the office by appearing on the balcony of St Peter’s Basilica wearing the same stole and pectoral cross that he had worn as the archbishop of Buenos Aires. He introduced himself as ‘the bishop of Rome’ bowing and asking the people to pray for him. At his installation as the Bishop of Parramatta, Bishop Vincent said: “I am committed to the renewal of the church patterned on the paschal rhythm of Christ: the church that dies to worldly power,

privilege, clericalism and rises to humility, simplicity, equality and servanthood; the church that might be smaller, poorer and humbler but hopefully more of a light and a sacrament of God's love to the world." We are called to reject the stability of a hierarchical society and become servants.

It's interesting that while ridiculing the Pharisees for their trappings of power and hypocrisy Jesus points out that the Law of Moses is still important. Jesus beautifully differentiates God's message from the messenger. If we listen to God's message, The Word; if we carry the burdens of others instead of putting burdens on their backs; if we humble ourselves to become servants then maybe someday someone will be able say: This Bible, The Word of God, has allowed us to live in this land for 20,000 years and our ladder will be against the right wall.