

Homily 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A 22nd January 2017

Light is essential to our survival, without our Sun we would simply cease to exist. We are creatures of the light. Our Universe was born in an outpouring of light. The afterglow of that moment of creation some 14 Billion years ago, referred as the ‘Big Bang’ can still be detected. It’s the white noise on an old analogue TV when it’s was not tuned to a channel or the hiss on an AM radio. This afterglow is from the very creation of the Universe which has been traveling since the very beginning of time. Light can’t be contained it permeates the Universe. Yet as creatures of light due to our own ego and own sense of importance we often find ourselves shuttered in darkness.

As I have told you before I was a volunteer in the RFS. One night I was in charge of a crew working on a fire on the Linden Ridge in the Blue Mountains. We were responsible for blacking out on the fire line along a hand tool trail about 2 Km long. In bushfire language “blacking out” means to completely extinguish the fire, a “hand tool trail” is as the name implies is a trail cut through the bush using hand tools about metre or so

wide. One of my jobs was to walk the trail one last time to make sure everything was blacked out. So I set off on my own with a torch and a radio. I got to the end of the trail and was quite happy with the work the crew had done however as I turned to walk back to the truck my torch failed. Now it was an overcast moonless night, so the darkness was total. The only thing I could do was radio for help and sit on a rock waiting for somebody to come and get me. As I sat in total darkness, contemplating how stupid I was to walk out there on my own, I became acutely aware of how dependant I was on light. As two other members of the crew walked out to lead me back I could see their lights growing brighter as they drew closer. I drew comfort from the approaching light. Sitting in the dark I realised my ego had got the better of me. I was convinced I could do this job on my own. It was only when I was alone in the darkness that I realised the foolishness of my motives.

In last week's Gospel we heard how John was preparing the way for the Christ. How John's baptism pointed to Christian Baptism by which we dwell in Christ's Mystical Body the Church and Christ dwell's in us. We learnt that the great challenge of our Baptism

is to recognise we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. In the beginning of today's Gospel we hear that Herod had had John arrested. Now Herod was a puppet king installed by the Romans to control Judea, Rome cared little about what Herod did providing he was loyal to Rome and kept the Jews under control. Herod was not a stable man to say the least; he was prone to fits of anger and extreme violence as typified by the murder of The Innocents. Even the Roman ruler Cesar Augustus said of him: "It is better to be Herod's dog than one of his children." The people would have known that the arrest of John the Baptist, whom they believed to be great prophet or even the Messiah, by Herod meant that John would probably be executed. Violence and terror were indeed a hallmark of Herod's reign. The people of Judea lived in a time of darkness a time of violence and terror, a time when God seemed far off and yet paradoxically God dwelt with them in Christ. Into the darkness of their night Christ brought the light of God. One of my favourite lines from the Psalms comes from Psalm 104 where the Psalmist describes God as "wrapped in light as with a robe". Our God is a God of light.

In the time of Herod the ordinary Jewish people were looking for the 'God of light' in their darkness. Likewise when I read of the carnage inflicted in Melbourne I feel we are "wrapped in darkness" and I ask myself; where is my God of light? Then I read of the heroic efforts of a homeless man who knelt amid the carnage to hold a seriously injured person's hand. I then come to the realisation that Christ is with us in the people dying and injured, in the heroic actions of ordinary people, in the police trying to stop the carnage. Then I ask myself the question where is Christ in the man driving the car, the instigator of the carnage. I am drawn to the question posed by Fr Paul Slyney in a theology class: Is God in Hell? The answer: Yes trying to love those who can't love him back. As difficult as it is I must conclude that Christ is with the man in the car trying to love someone who can't love him back.

My wife Kaye and I have just had our grandkids for three days and I can't help but think how I would feel as the grandfather of that child who was killed. What would be my reaction to the driver and no doubt there are people here at St Michael's for whom such a senseless tragedy is not a thought but a reality. Other thoughts cross my mind and I am sure that in my

training at Macquarie Hospital I have met residents who without the care they receive would be capable of such acts of violence. I read that the driver of the car was 'known to police' and had a history of mental illness and violence. I am drawn inexplicitly to ask: Why did this have to happen? Our society is capable of better than this we can achieve great things. If you doubt our ability to plan and overcome great problems take a drive along Windsor Rd and look at the construction of the North West Rail Link. Whether you agree with it or not you have to admit it's a marvel of construction. Why do we choose to sit alone in the darkness? Just like the people in Judea we are faced with a choice: Do we embrace the darkness or the light? In the darkness we are alone and frighten. In the light we find liberty from fear and companionship in the Body of Christ. There is however 'no free lunch' embracing Christ's light costs. It's much easier to talk about the theology of the Gospel than it is to ask the question; Why can we build the North West Rail Link and yet can't find enough money to manage mental health in our society? From the very moment of creation we have been bathed in God's light so we can either; open the shutters of our heart and let that light

flood in or we can sit alone on a rock in darkness,
loneliness and fear. The choice is ours.