

Homily 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B 22nd July 2018

Kermit the frog of the Muppets fame said: It's hard being green. Well I think it's hard being me, it's hard being human. I like my tidy life, I like to design computers to run my model trains, I like to start writing my homilies on Thursdays, and I like my tidy life. I look at the news and despair I ask myself: Where is the compassion in our world? I read that the State of Israel the home of the Jewish people has enacted "one state one race" legislation. The Israeli Prime Minister said "This is our state, the Jewish state." I'm reminded of a chilling quote I once saw superimposed over a picture of the entrance of Auschwitz Concentration Camp: "The gardener divides vegetation into 'cultured plants' to be taken care of, and weeds to be exterminated." How can the Jewish people, a people who have suffered much more than many other nations at the hands of nationalist fanatics enact such vile legislation? I read Jesus words in this morning's Gospel; "he took pity on them". In this case 'pity' is a very poor translation of the Greek, 'gut wrenching' would be a much better translation. The only other time this

phase is used in the Gospels is when the father sees his prodigal son returning and is moved to 'pity'. Jesus looks on the crowd and has pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. As I ponder this scene on the shores of the lake with the crowds seeking refuge in the word of Jesus, I am reminded of the chilling television images that flood into my room as I watch the ABC morning news eating my breakfast safe in the comfort of my home. Haunting images of refugees seeking refuge on the Israeli border, driven there by barrel bombs and poison gas, driven there by the unspeakable horrors of the Syrian civil war to be greeted not by compassion but by machine guns, barbed wire and the words: "Go away, go away, or something bad will happen". I switch off the morning news this is too difficult to handle over breakfast. But the Syrian refugees have no such luxury they can't simply push a stop button and their lives will return to normal, they must return to the barrel bombs and poison gas. I sit over my toast recalling the splendour of the Helsinki meeting between Trump and Putin. I'm filled with rage at the stupidity of Trump, at the cunning of the manipulative Putin, at the callousness of the Israeli border guards. How could these people act

with such indifference to their fellow humans? How can people be treated as pawns in a geo-political chess game? I hate the Trumps, the Putins, and the border guards of the world. I the words of Psalm 138; I hate them with perfect hate. But, isn't how they the Trumps, the Putins, and the border guards of the world hate. I question myself what gives me the moral high ground I'm just like them.

As I ponder this I'm reminded of the words of Michael Casey OCSO a monk from the Tarrawarra Monastery in Victoria. In his book on Grace, Casey quotes from the Roman poet Terence *"I am a human being and nothing that belongs to humanity is foreign to me."* Casey then writes: *If we live in truth we cannot turn aside from the anti-human elements of our collective history or from the malicious tendencies that may sometimes influence the choices we make. Probably, most of us would have accepted employment as guards in a concentration camp – if our circumstances had been different. Such a step would have been simply the inevitable consequence of a long series of compromises, each one legitimatised by the fact that it was hardly different from what went before. Perhaps the only thing that*

holds us back from crimes against humanity is the lack of opportunity.”

I am not trying to justify crimes against humanity as some twists of fate. On the contrary I'm sickened by humanity's inhumanity. But, I am saying of both the victims and perpetrators; there for the grace of God go I. Casey's cautionary words sit uneasy in my head. Then I remember my morning, I have promised to help a mate with a problem on his model railway and I have to be back in time for the arrival of my grandkids at around 11:30.

I'll let you into a secret, while Kaye my wife plans our time with our grandkids with the detail and precision of a royal wedding I am somewhat more cautious. While I love all my grandkids I know they are disruptors. I like my tidy life, and despite Kaye's meticulous planning I know that like all great battle plans they will be rendered useless within the first minutes, as one activity is described as boring by one while the other says tearfully I'm home sick already. I must say at this moment I struggle I think they are spoilt, I'm angry they don't appreciate all Kaye's plans and I feel left out. I always feel left out. By day two

the grand plans have all but been abandoned, I have abandoned any expectation of an ordered life for the next three days and apologised to my lovely wife for being, well I can't say what I'd like to say in a homily so I'll leave it you to figure out. I spend the evening with the boys showing them the Moon, Venus and Jupiter through my telescope and wonder where all the emotions I'd felt over the last days came from and went too. Kaye's taken the boys to the shops so I can write this homily so the house is quiet again. As I sit I think my grandkids are just kids they are not refugees but as I think I'm beginning to understand how those in our community feel who oppose refugees. They like me don't want their lives upset. Like me they feel left out. Like me they fear changes to their lives, they worry about jobs, they worry about the cost of housing. As I sit and ponder what I have written, Michael Casey's words haunt me if I can't be flexible enough to accept the disruption of my routine caused by my grandkids who am I to lecture others on how to behave. Once again my grandkids have taught their Pop George a great lesson. Plans are not important; tidy lives are not important; people are important very last one of them. Christ did not pick and choose who in

the crowd he would teach, he taught them all. He was moved to pity by the plight of the crowd no matter how exhausted He was. I have to learn to let go of my tidy life, I have to learn to love unconditionally. How do I respond to Trump, Putin, the Israeli Government and the Syrian refugees? My only response can be compassion that's what my grandkids have taught me.

Mahatma Ghandi said "A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members." I wonder how I, we will be judged? As I said; it's hard being me, it's hard being human.