

HOMILY 29th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
SERVICE NOT ENTITLEMENT

Mk 10.35-45 Is 53.10-11 Heb 4.14-16

Welcome now the 29th weekend of Ordinary Time, with the ongoing reminder of the moral obligation of COVID vaccination, so get to it, if you haven't already. There will be a requirement of proof of double vaccination, as well as for prior registration for those who wish to attend Mass here after we open up in November.

On Friday, at Rosebud, I was celebrant of the celebration of life and funeral of Lyn Webb, an old friend from my seminarian days in 1977 at Holy Saviour Parish North Glen Waverley, where I was also later parish priest for 5 years from 1993. I had been invited by Eric Hodgens, the parish priest and continuing friend and mentor, to be involved in an environment where there was a growing community, much enthusiasm, energy and engagement, the parish founded in only 1974.

I had just decided to return to training for the priesthood after a year back at home with my family, pursuing an honours degree in chemistry at Monash Uni, pondering my future in life. Figuring I needed some parish and school experience to discern whether or not priesthood was for me, I spent considerable time that year living in the presbytery and was commissioned to get music and youth groups going.

While I had learned piano for 10 years or so, I couldn't sing for nuts, but I did appreciate music and could bang out a tune when necessary. When I asked for volunteers to help with singing, 3 young mums came forward, one with guitar and babe in arms, agreeing to have a go. And so we got started, culminating in an ABC Sunday Mass recorded early in 1978, with me as conductor and organist. Lyn was one of those who came forward, but with some uncertainty, as she told me she could only play 3 guitar chords at the time, so we'd have to limit our choice of hymns!! Needless to say, she developed her skills, and we ended up with quite a tuneful and competent little parish choir, despite my significant shortcomings in the musical arena.

And we did manage to get a successful youth group going at the same time. Funnily enough, while I appreciate the wonderful choirs in the parishes where I have been since those early days, there hasn't been need for me to have too much direct input, as there have so been many far more skilled than I in the music field, co-ordinating music and liturgical celebrations in general.

In my second life at Holy Saviour, 16 years later as parish priest, Lyn had taken on the role of *'lollipop lady'* outside the presbytery. She was the ideal person for the role, as she always had a welcoming smile, a friendly demeanour, and was interested in every person, old or young, or middle-aged, who crossed that street. Her positive spirit was ever present, undaunted by the weather or whatever else was going on in her life.

Her faith was deep and personal, very much lived out in the parish community and school with her family, as her 4 boys grew up, 2 of whom I married along the way. Her sons all spoke lovingly and movingly of her as a person who was selfless and ever concerned about others. Her husband and loving partner of nearly 56 years, Les, was always by her side, to encourage and support her endeavours and commitment to service of family, friends and community.

Her early life was described as a somewhat dark period, where things were not easy, and, whilst intelligent and diligent, she had to leave school early to support her mother and herself. The *silver times* were the later freedom of her teenaged years and then being courted by Les into marriage in 1966, followed by the *golden times* of family life and her primary occupation, stating with pride: *"I'm a Mum!"*

Then, as her eldest son Jeff described her finest moment as his own birth (facetiously, of course!!), he summed up her more than modest achievements: *"Holy Saviour primary school and the parish became her playground. Guitarist in the choir, youth group leader, crossing lady for the school, pottery, painting, spinning wool, netball, you name it, she was involved. She devoted much of her 20 prime years to the Holy Saviour Community, loving people and people loving her... She knew how to have fun and gather friends."* In later life in retirement, *"She instantly became a member of the bowls club, the Ukulele group, the book club, walking club, art painting club, helping deliver meals through Vinnies."* Here was a person who knew how to engage,

be involved and to serve, with a sense of humility and humour. To my mind, her faith was well lived out in action, in all sorts of ways. Her final months were difficult, debilitating and frustrating, but I have no doubt that she was more concerned about Les and her boys and their wives, her 11 grandchildren and one great grandchild, than she was about herself, to the end.

A few simple pithy words of wisdom remain on her fridge door: *“Be positive. Things work out best for the people who make the best of the way things work out!”* *“Let go and let God”* and a final little prayer: *“Dear God, when I am stressing, give me your blessing.”*

Today’s Gospel has Jesus confronting his innermost circle, with what must have been massive frustration and disappointment (well over half-way through Mark’s Gospel!), starting with James and John, who have totally misread his words about his coming Passion, suffering and death, still with their own delusions about the power and glory to come in the Kingdom they imagined and hoped for in their own minds. To them, it is still a Roman Empire model they hope for, with high positions of power and might, command and control, not to forget the pleasure of privilege and prestige, all a passing illusion.

James and John, sons of poor old Zebedee, left behind with his boat and his nets, to fend for himself, at least some of the time, while they are off on a jaunt with Jesus, hoping for a better life. They should’ve known better, as we’ve heard before! At the same time, one might hope it would eventually sink in, that the journey of disciple’s life was not a freeway to freedom from responsibility and care. Remember, even in Gethsemane, they disappeared into the darkness when the going got tough and hear overwhelmed them, leaving Jesus to the mercy of the arresting guards. Yet, they all came good in the end, with the exception of the betrayer, but who was ultimately penitent as well.

The call of the disciple, and so to you and me, is to service, not self-service, but outreach to others, following the words and deeds of Jesus who shows the way all the way to the end, and beyond.

I reckon my friend Lyn is a great example of a faithful disciple, which is why I have focussed on her life today. As she would see it, an ordinary person providing service to others extraordinarily well, throughout her 78 years, along with a great sense of joy and gratitude in life as well, counting the blessings and persevering with determination through the difficulties of the darker moments. The crosses are real, but so are the blessings, as we follow the way of Jesus in truth, love and service, on our life’s, at times rocky, journey.

john hannon

17th October 2021