

## All Saints Parish Portland 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass Homily 22nd Sunday of Year C - August 28, 2022



I sometimes see ads for business seminars. These are conferences that offer tips on how to be successful in business. If we attended one of these seminars, we might hear about the need to set clear goals for our business and the importance of motivating ourselves and our staff to achieve these goals. We might also hear about the importance of advertising so that our prospective customers would know what we have to offer.

On reading the Scriptures for this Sunday's Mass, I was struck by the difference between the usual business seminars and the Bible when it comes to advice on how to be successful. This morning's passage from the Book of Ecclesiasticus doesn't mention goals or motivation or advertising. What it does talk about is *gentleness*. "Be gentle in carrying out your business, and you will be better loved than a lavish giver." A gentle approach might not bring immediate profits in the aggressive world of high finance and commercial competition, but then again, a gentle approach may be better for winning the trust and collaboration of business associates and so be actually more profitable in the long run. Whatever the case may be in the business of making money, today's Scriptures clearly recommend a gentle and humble approach in the business of finding our way into the kingdom of God.

The first reading tells us that gentleness and humility will bring a blessing from the Lord, whereas pride is like a sickness that will bring ruin. The message of the gospel is similar: those who humble themselves are the ones who will be exalted; those who try to exalt themselves will be humbled. Christ tells a parable about a wedding feast. Those who come to such a feast should remember that they come as *guests*. They have no right to take for themselves the places of honour. They should wait for the host to direct them to the places prepared for them. It's the *host's* party and the host is the one who should decide who sits where.

In our competitive society, we might be inclined to think that assertiveness is the way to success in everything, even in regard to the kingdom of God. We might imagine that we can win a place at the heavenly banquet by the sheer force of our own efforts. Christ teaches us that this is not so. We need to rely on the mercy of God to grant us the gift of eternal life. It is those who recognise their limitations, those who humble themselves, who will be exalted. It is those who admit their dependence on God who are open to receive the blessings that God wishes to grant us.

Today we give thanks for the blessings God has bestowed on this parish of Portland over the past 175 years. We give thanks for the people who have formed this parish community through all that time. Some of those people would have been well known in their day. Many would have been little known. But all have been known and loved by God and God has been with them through all those years. From humble beginnings, God has raised up this parish community and sustained this community, generation after generation.

The historical accounts tell us that it was in September 1847 that Father John Kavanagh became the first resident Pastor of Portland. He signed himself as "Minister of Portland and Port Fairy" and his ministry was extensive. He travelled on horseback between Portland and Port Fairy and he also visited many other places, such as Tower Hill, Dunkeld, Hamilton, and even Mt Gambier. Father Kavanagh built up the early community in Portland and beyond. He also built the first Catholic chapel in Portland as a place for the community to come together to celebrate the liturgy.

As we gather for the Mass today, we're linked in spirit to those who gathered in that first chapel. We're also joined in spirit with all those who have been part of the Portland Parish Community for these past 175 years. We rejoice as we recall the beginnings of the Parish and the history as it has unfolded. We give thanks for the priests and religious and laity who have served the parish community through all that time. We give thanks for all the people who have cared for the community – often in humble and hidden ways. From humble beginnings, God has raised up this parish community and guided the community through the years. We give thanks for all that God has done here and we pray that God will continue to bless us now and in the years ahead.

*Bishop Paul Bird CSSR*