

Homily for 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A, February 14th – 15th 2026

Fr Justin Driscoll

6.30pm Dunnstown 9.00am Ballarat East 10.30am Buninyong

On Thursday evening after an afternoon with the staff of St Brigid's Ballan at the Mary MacKillop Heritage Centre in East Melbourne, I managed to catch the 8.08pm train back from Southern Cross Station. The train was particularly crowded, and I eventually realised that many travellers had been attending the rally in the Melbourne CBD to protest the visit to Australia the President of Israel, Isaac Hertzog.

After a few stations when the passenger numbers had thinned, I caught up with passengers from Ballarat who'd attended the protest rally, some admitting that it was the first such protest they'd ever attended. Amongst them was a Palestinian friend whose family I'd visited in Jerusalem some years ago. Of course, we talked about the Middle East and the ongoing struggles, the fragile ceasefire, our own growing polarisation and the Bondi shootings. Our conversation also included the role of the law in relation the right to protest and the use of authority in peace keeping. Law and order more generally continue to be two issues that feature strongly in every election campaign all over the world. Some emphasise law and order as an indication of their strength as a leader and usually talk about getting tough on crime or cracking down while others appeal to law and order to offer security and safety, seeking to allay people's fears and bring calm. Measures to ensure that we keep the law include great police presence, think of the random breath tests for alcohol and drugs, or the public safety officers on our public transport. Other measures aimed at deterrence include CCTV cameras, distress alarms and safety lighting. Many of these measures suggest that in order for us to keep the law, we need the big stick to keep us in line or the threat of being caught breaking the law to prevent us from offending in the first place.

When it comes to faith and our shared life of faith together as the Church, do we bring that same mindset in regard to the law? Our Scriptures talk of our enjoying the freedom of the daughters and sons of God – what does it mean? For some, freedom means the absence of law and the capacity to live unbounded – which I would suggest is anarchy. But the thought that freedom can be found by living the law is a contradiction to some. Such questions also ask us to consider our own image of God that hold.

Our 2nd reading from St Paul in today's Mass speaks of our becoming coming to maturity in Christ. As people seeking such maturity, our own relation to the law is important, lest it keep us at a childish and immature level? Do they motivate us by fear or by love? Do we do what we know to be the right thing because, simply because we believe it is the right thing, or because we're afraid of the

consequences of being caught if we don't. Our grappling with these questions is necessary and affects how we live, the morality that we live by and the ethics that guide us – we refer to our moral compass, is that an inner moral compass or an external one?

Matthew's Gospel that we read from his year, offers a portrait of Jesus who comes not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to carry forward to its fulfilment the movement of transcending, interiorizing, stripping away the empty externals and legalistic minutiae that had distorted God's revelation. Matthew is a scribe who became a disciple: he shows both his respect for the old Law and his enthusiasm for the new vision of Jesus.

Matthew gathers together these series of collected saying of Jesus and presents them as part of the Sermon on the Mount, that includes the Beatitudes. With its emphasis on the fulfillment of the Law of Moses, Matthew's focus is on the way the law takes root in the human heart – proposing a radical reinterpretation of the traditional teaching. These collected sayings of Jesus outline seven characteristics of the way Christians are to deal with one another and the world

1. We seek opportunities to forgive those who've hurt us
2. We consider reconciliation as a prerequisite before worship of God.
3. We are slow to sue, preferring personal negotiation to litigation
4. We keep our desires in check and don't objectify others
5. We look at the causes of our sin and change the circumstances that give rise to our destructive thoughts and behaviors
6. We remain faithful to those we love
7. We mean what we say when we make serious, mature, and adult promises

St Paul speaks today of the two ways: the way of worldly wisdom "of this age" and the wisdom of those who are mature in faith and believe in what can only be discerned in the power of the Spirit – may we seek to live by the wisdom of God.