

Chaplain's Assembly – Father Philip Murphy SSC
23rd October 2014
“Pastoral Care Week”

Reading: John 21:15-18

The talk began with a film clip from the film “Up” where a young boy comes to the house of an old man and offers to help him across the road in order to gain a ‘helping the elderly’ badge for his uniformed organisation.

That film “Up” made in 2009 is about an old man who wants to save the house he has lived in for many years and ties thousands of balloons to it, then setting off for an adventure with the young Wilderness Explorer, Russell.

This week is Pastoral Care Week, a week around the world where we give thanks for people who provide Pastoral Care. That might be priests, ministers, counsellors, teachers, volunteers or friends. It can be you or I.

A Christian understanding of Pastoral Care comes from the two great commandments which Jesus gave and which we heard earlier in the week. When asked what the most important commandments were, Jesus said that they were to : love the Lord your God and to love your neighbour. Jesus summed up hundreds and hundreds of laws and commandments, including the famous ten commandments of Moses, and presented them as two easy to understand laws. Love God and love your neighbour.

So Pastoral Care really flows from our love of God. If we love God and do not care about those around us, then our love of God is fairly hollow. If we spend our lives serving other people and ignoring God, then there is something missing in the picture.

The same message is true in today's reading we heard. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him, and each time Peter said yes, and in fact got upset that Jesus asked him so many times. Every time Peter said that he did love Jesus, Jesus told him to do something: Feed my lambs; take care of my sheep and feed my sheep. Jesus was telling Peter to look after his people, to be pastorally caring for them. And to do so because he loved God. Jesus was saying to Peter - if you love me (God) then you must love your neighbour. You must show that love.

This picture is taken around the Sea of Galilee in Israel, in the area where Jesus told Peter to feed his sheep, and the statue shows Peter kneeling before Jesus as Jesus gives him this important job to do.



Two commands, love God and love your neighbour.

But actually in those commands of Jesus, we often talk about two commands, but really there are three. Jesus said love God, but then he went on to say: love your neighbour as yourself. In other words you need to love both your neighbour and you need to love yourself. You need to accept yourself, a creation of God, made in his likeness, love yourself and love your neighbour in the same way. If you hate yourself, how can you love those around you?

For Russell, in the film “Up”, the desire to reach out and help an old person was because he wanted a badge. In fact later on in the film they both end up caring for each other as they get to know each other better on their journey. The reason for Russell’s pastoral care changes from duty to one of love.

The priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” Pastoral care is important not just because we should be concerned for one another, but also because we are made in the image of God and our pastoral care shows not just what we think about ourselves, but also what we think about God.