

A Land of Droughts and Flooding Rains



The Bishop Speaks



When I arrived in Armidale in February 2012 large parts of the Diocese were affected by floods. Now in 2019, as I travel around the parishes every elderly farmer I talk to tells me this is the worst drought in their living memory. Indeed, our region and much of Australia is currently impacted by one of the worst droughts in recorded history.

We are all experiencing the effects of this drought with many of our cities and towns now under severe water restrictions. But this pales almost into insignificance when we think of the farmers who have no crops to harvest, no feed or water for their stock, and that stock which remains has to be sold or shot because of this. And let's not forget all the rural businesses and communities who are also going

under because the farmers have no money to spend. This all has a huge toll on both physical and mental well-being. I think we all realize that this drought is seriously impacting the lives of individuals and families.

What about a spiritual impact? Is this drought affecting us spiritually? I think it is. For one thing, it has people praying more or at least praying more fervently. My prayer every day is for bountiful rain, for an end to the drought, and that the farmers and all others affected will be sustained in faith and hope until the drought breaks.

Country people are incredibly resilient. However, I believe we are now at the stage where mere human resilience is not enough. We need Divine resilience,

Front Cover: Sts Mary & Joseph's Cathedral Parish Sanctuary, celebrating 100 years since the dedication of the new altar - Photo taken by Kerry Myers

Divine Assistance, Divine Grace. We need from God the gifts or the virtues of faith, of hope, of perseverance, of fortitude.

You might think “What has fortitude got to do with it?” The virtue of fortitude, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, “denotes a certain firmness of mind...and this firmness of mind is required both in doing good and in enduring evil, especially with regard to goods or evils that are difficult.” And this drought is definitely an evil which is difficult.

Another type of spiritual effect of the drought may be for some people to question God. The presence of any kind of evil often has this effect on us. In such times we need to remind ourselves of a couple of the basic facts of our faith: first, evil does not come from God – only good comes from his hands; and second, God in his providence can and does draw good things out of evil situations.

What might these good things be in our current situation? I can think of a couple: We become more aware of our human vulnerability and our dependence upon God and the goods of the Earth that he has created. And we become more aware of each other as our eyes are opened to see the plight of those who are harder hit than ourselves. All around me I am seeing evidence of mutual support, practical assistance, helping hands, and listening ears as we grow in our love and care for one another and in our bonding together as communities.

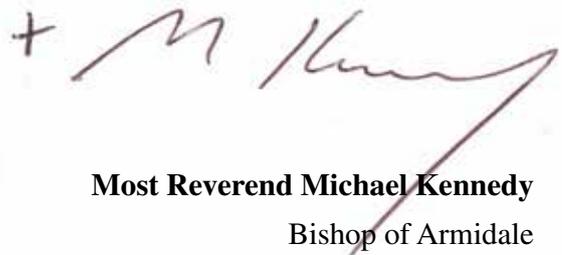
There is still one more spiritual effect of drought that people seemed more attuned to in times past than we do in our present day. In the Biblical times of the Old Testament we find numerous occasions when

drought, famine, or disaster were interpreted by the people as an opportunity to be shaken back to their senses, and to turn from sin and back to God. They even saw them as being permitted by God precisely for this purpose. In such times the people of Israel would recall all the good that God had done for them in the past, how ungrateful they had been, and how far they had strayed from His paths.

I suggest that this is actually a very good and religious way for us today to approach our situation of severe drought: To remember and see how wonderfully generous God has been to us throughout our life; to thank him for his goodness and generosity; to be contrite for any lack of gratitude on our part or any straying from his paths or distancing ourselves from him; and to strive to grow each day in our love for God and neighbour.

When we approach any calamity or hardship in this way our faith in God’s goodness is restored and our endurance, fortitude, and hope are strengthened. God who has been so good to us in the past will again be good to us in the future and is in fact still good to us now if we but open our eyes to see.

Let us all continue to help each other, to pray, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

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Bishop of Armidale

