

Day of Recollection Homily  
John XXIII College, Perth  
Fr. Tony Lusvardi, S.J.

Col 3:12-14, 16-17

Matt 5:13-16

A couple of nights ago I was meeting with a group in the library here at John XXIII, and I left about 8:30 PM. Because of the construction, the outside lights were all off, and it was cloudy with no moon or stars. I couldn't see where to go. It was so dark that even taking just a few steps could have been dangerous. Fortunately, I was with Mrs. Lumley and Mrs. Murphy, and we could use the torches on our phones to walk safely to our cars.

We need light to know where to go. Without light, we're without direction. Without light or direction, we will probably hurt ourselves and we might hurt others too. In the Gospel passage we just read, Jesus tells his followers, "You are the light of the world." And he tells them not to hide that light. Don't light a lamp, he says, and put it under a basket. It wouldn't do any good to turn on the torch on your phone if you then put the phone back in your pocket.

Today your day of reflection is about the theme of respectful relationships. The first reading is about how Christians should treat other people—with compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness. That goes even a bit farther than simply respect, but it all starts with respect.

Respectful relationships mean, to put it very simply, that we treat other people

like people and not like objects. There's a difference between a person and a thing, and we should never treat a person like a thing. If my phone doesn't work—if the torch doesn't come on when I need it—well, I can get rid of it and buy a new phone. But if a person doesn't do what I want or a person is inconvenient for me or a person stands in the way of my wants or desires or plans, I can't just get rid of that person. Because a person is not a thing. And if you treat a person like a thing, that's a sin. We can buy things and sell things and throw things away, but if we treat a person like that, that's a sin.

You are at an age—Year 8—when you are starting to grow up, and you are starting to ask questions—important questions—like “why?” When you were little, you might have been satisfied if your parents or your teachers told you “just because,” but now you probably want something a little bit more than “just because.” So why are people different than things? If you don't believe in God, probably the only thing you can say is “just because.” But Christians know that there is a reason, and that reason is that God has made people in his image. He doesn't make things in his image. Things cannot become the children of God. Only people can be children of God. And God expects us to treat his children with respect.

The value of a thing comes from what it does for us. If my phone has no light, can't take pictures, can't go online, doesn't have apps, well, it's not a very valuable phone, is it? It can't do much for me. But people aren't valuable because of what they do for me. They're valuable because of what they are.

Who they are. Persons. Children of God. And it doesn't matter if you are rich or poor; tall or short; black or white; male or female; young or old; Australian or something else. A little baby just conceived in her mother's womb is just as much the image of God as the King of England.

If we forget this, we will be walking in darkness. We'll get lost and we'll probably hurt ourselves and others. But if you remember this, you are the light of the world. The world needs this light, so don't hide it away. Remember that you are much more than a thing; you are much more valuable than any object; you are made in God's image; and remember to treat each other—to treat everyone without exception—as someone, as a person, made in the image of God.