

Homily for Parishes in the Western Region without clergy

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 1st September 2019, Pentecost 12

Readings: **Jeremiah 2:4-13**

Psalms 81:1, 10-16

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Luke 14:1 (2-6) 7-14

On this day in Australia it is technically the first day of Spring, and 'though it's terribly dry there are already many colourful gardens in Toowoomba as we look forward to celebrating the 70th Carnival of Flowers later this month. To my astonishment the daffodil bulbs that I planted in memory of my Dad some months ago are starting to open surrounded by Australian natives. And of course today is Fathers' Day in Australia and so we give thanks for those we call 'Dad'... Or, at the very least reflect on the quality of relationship that exists between fathers and grandfathers, children and grandchildren.

It seems like an obvious thing to say but when those relationships have been positive there is much to give thanks for, and when they have been negative there is much to grieve. I don't think there is a single book which comprehensively explains how to be a good man, or a good Dad, but there have many thoughts expressed about this in poems, songs, and prose. An example that has haunted me through the years is the poem 'If' by Rudyard Kipling which suggests:

"If you can dream, and not make dreams your master; if you can think, and not make thoughts your aim; if you can meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same; if you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, or watch the things you gave your life to broken, and stoop and build 'em with worn out tools... If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run, yours is the earth and everything that's in it, and – which is more – you'll be a man, my son!"

It's a bit two dimensional until you see it lived out in the life of a man you love or respect. Hollywood offers some interesting images of what a man should be like, and these can seem more attractive because of the cinematography, music, and special effects. But, many of these seem to stereotype male heroes as people who resolve conflict through violence. Last month the movie 'Angel has Fallen' was released and this was the third movie in which US Secret Service Agent, Mike Banning, rescues the American President. I'm not sure what the final body count is, but lots of people die, and the inference is that a good man is someone who fights well, is willing to sacrifice everything for his country, and who never gives up.

Not to be outdone – Sylvester Stallone features this month in a movie called 'Last Blood' which will be released thirty seven years he appeared as John Rambo in 'First Blood'! Now, the hero is a retired veteran who takes on a Mexican drug cartel, and from the movie trailer many people get killed, and many things get destroyed.

Dismayed by these offerings of what could be called toxic masculinity, in which physical strength and the ability to kill is primary, the Gospel reading from Luke this week offers two radically different ideas. Put simply, what Jesus affirmed for all who take his life and teaching seriously, is the importance of humility and hospitality in a life of faith.

Not for the first time we hear about Jesus being present in the community observing what was going on. He'd been invited to a meal by a community leader and could see that some people who understood themselves as better than others had sat in places of honour, without waiting to be invited by the host. We might smile as we imagine this, but I have a hunch that we all do something similar for there is an

inclination within us that can assume we are right, and that our group is the best group! So when people look different to us, think differently about politics, or make different choices in life... we just might look down on them. We might even assume some moral, intellectual, or economic superiority and consider to be less than we are.

Jesus unequivocally challenges this, and if we were to take it back to the first principle belief that all of humanity is made in God's image that makes sense. Those people we look down on, and think of as less, are also beloved children of God... and, in God we are related to them. That homeless person; that morbidly obese person; that drug addict; that youth in juvenile detention; that person struggling to speak English; that person who voted for a political party we utterly disagree with. All, beloved children of God... even our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And, just in case we didn't get it Jesus continues in the Gospel, *"When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind..."* This flies in the face of what anthropologists call mutual reciprocity in which we do good for someone, with the hope and expectation that they will reciprocate in kind.

I think this is a way of operating we all understand, and I don't think Jesus is trying to replace it. Instead, I think he is challenging the inclination we have to only do good to people who have the capacity to reciprocate. To only be kind to people, who will in turn be kind to us.

Uncomfortably, Jesus seems to be saying that everyone has a right to be at our table, in the same way that they are always welcome at God's table. So, my suggested compromise is this: let's continue to invite those we consider to be friends and family, but, over the next few months risk inviting some people who are not part of this group... Even some we currently consider to be unlovely, or unlovable, trusting that God's grace will be in the midst of that time.

It's not easy... and it's worth taking into prayer now:

Holy God, we give thanks for the gift of our lives and for your love. We give thanks for the challenge in your Gospel to see other people through your eyes, and be more generous and kind. We ask for the guidance and blessing of your Spirit as we respond to this challenge, and pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.