

## Reflections on the Gospel reading for Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2025 - Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year C

On entering the church any Sunday in Lent, we might notice a little card board box on one corner of the entrance table. It is the box for 'Project Compassion' an initiative of Caritas Australia. As I turn now to today's gospel reading on 'The Prodigal Son,' I have that little box in mind. We will return to it.

This gospel narrative offers us a story full of characters:

From tax collectors seeking out Jesus; then to Pharisees and scribes doing their best to undermine both parties.

To the son, first of all, 'the younger', growing impatient and getting it into his head to ask for his promised inheritance, which, once granted is spent living the high life first of all, before transforming its wondrous promise into a life of utter destitution. From which he learnt a powerful lesson. So we find him next, starving and exhausted, deciding to search out his father seeking forgiveness that he may be readmitted to the household, even as a servant.

Then we have the father, seeing his son from a long way off, and being '*moved with pity*', clasping his son close and before the repentant boy had time for his prepared speech, calling on the servants to kill the calf '*we have been fattening*' (obviously, for a special occasion), and to prepare a feast.

Then comes the elder son, working hard as he had always done, hearing the music and dancing, remonstrating angrily with his father and his young brother, refusing to join the festivities, to be met by the gentle response: '*My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it is only right that we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost, and is found*'

Called on to offer a reflection on this beautifully told story and wondering where to begin, I did what I usually do at such times and asked someone whom I know to have more imagination than I do, which of these characters one might dwell on. His answer was immediate: '*The fattened calf.*'

I really hadn't wanted to think on the fattened calf at all and its inevitable butchering. Thinking further however, gave me pause as we sat in conversation, and teasing out a few ideas.

This was the innocent one who provided the feast and given the '*music and dancing*' around it, offered something more than a meal. It was a party: a full-scale celebration of life around a table to which all were invited!

How apt a reminder.

- In a world where in the last few weeks only, the World Food Programme has been 'financially gutted' as one News Agency described it:
- Where Kier Starmer in the UK, seems intent on cutting aid to CAFOD to allow more spending on defence. ((A fact I had to check as I didn't want to believe it).
- Where even here, locally, in Victoria, last Friday's Age ran an article headlined, '*Food banks, homeless services, fear funding cut as horror budget looms*' ('Age,' 28/03/pg. 9)

Three examples only of a world in which care for 'other' has scant place.

We live in one of the most affluent countries in the world. Most of us possibly, may have a table or two, maybe with a chair to share. The little project compassion box sitting on the entrance table might serve as a reminder to us to ponder occasionally on what our responsibilities might be in contributing to the wellbeing of another less fortunate than we are, and what we might do personally - sometimes, at least.

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