

JESUS' TAKE ON HOSPITALITY

Jesus said, *'...when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. And you will be blessed.'* Luke 14.13-14

Jesus was dependent on others for their hospitality. And his whole life was hospitable – inviting others to travel with him. The Latin word 'hospes' referred to welcoming a guest. This became linked to the idea of entertainment. Hospitality offered protection, provision and respect to strangers and it sustained bonds among family, friends and acquaintances.

In Leviticus we read, 'When foreigners live with you in your land, don't take advantage of them. Treat them as one of your own. Love them just the same. Remember you were once foreigners yourselves in Egypt. I am God, your God.' Lev.19.34

What does that say about our attitudes to refugees on Manus and Nauru?

A week ago Fr. Frank Brennan – Catholic intellectual, Rev Tim Costello – CEO World Vision Aus., Dr Robert Manne - former Jewish professor of Politics and John Menadue – former Secretary of Immigration, released a statement that acknowledged the argument that today's refugees cannot be brought to Australia en masse because this would act as a positive signal to people smugglers who could begin their human trafficking trade again. Yet these erudite commentators maintained that we should 'continue close cooperation with the Indonesian authorities, keep employing the turn back policy and empty the off shore processing centres. We must restore the chance of a future to those 1750 souls we sent to Nauru or Manus Island 3 years ago by settling them in Australia or other developed countries.' I say, people cannot live without hope.

In Hebrews we read, 'Be ready with a meal or a bed when it's needed. Why? Some have extended hospitality to angels without even knowing it!' Heb.13.2

This refers to the time when Abraham and Sarah, his wife, were hospitable to three souls who prophesied that they would have a son in their senior years. Sarah laughed, Abraham kept on trusting.

Peter, the apostle, says when writing to the Christian communities in Asia Minor, 'Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.' 1 Peter 4.9
Enough said – note, grumbling is not always voiced. Grudging hospitality exhausts hosts and wounds guests even as it serves them.

Luke's Gospel majors on hospitality. The ritual of foot washing marks the movement from stranger to guest. Such hospitality was a necessity of desert life and in the ancient world this meant graciously receiving an alienated person into one's land, home and community and providing for their needs. This also meant permitting the visitor to harvest corners of one's own patch, clothing the naked, providing food for the needy and including the outcast in religious celebrations. Remember when Jesus told some of his followers to travel with the good news of the Gospel and not to take anything with them? The reason was that he was elevating the practice of hospitality among his people. But this was counter-cultural in the Graeco-Roman world where fear of the god of hospitality, Zeus, was paramount. Jesus' followers are called to be exemplary hosts and exemplary guests. And what did they eat? - pomegranates, fish, grapes, figs, flat bread, lamb, honey and olive oil, all with wine and water.

Mum and Dad had few friends and seldom visitors. I recall a family who came to tea once and we had saveloys, bread and butter and homemade tomato sauce. When we went to their place they had frankfurts. I asked Mum if we could have these soon. She said, 'They're dearer.'
(Now you know why I love cocktail frankfurts.)

If we are what we eat, then I should be a doughnut without a hole. But I reckon that we're more than that – souls with bodies. Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life, those who follow me will never be hungry in spirit again.'

'For what we have received Lord, we are truly thankful.' AMEN



