

Homily - Laurie's Farewell Masses - 1/2 June 2019

So, (if you were alive then) what were you doing 50 years ago, back in 1969?

The year that the Beatles made their final public appearance, the year Sesame Street began on television, the year John Lennon & Yoko Ono recorded 'Give Peace a Chance', when those men walked on the moon, when Rain Lover won the Melbourne Cup, when I was in Grade one and I had my tonsils out, and when Richmond won the Premiership, and Essendon finished 6th on the Ladder?

It's great that we are able to come together this weekend to celebrate what Laurie did on this weekend 50 years ago – the commitment he made, the risk and the leap of faith he took, and now 50 years later to celebrate and congratulate him on such a long time of faithful service and generous ministry as a Priest in the Church of Melbourne.

How lucky are we to have shared in that time as his parishioners here at St Thomas More?

A couple of weeks ago I was having a conversation with one of the parishioners about Laurie retiring and leaving us – as you know there's been many of those conversations over the last few months! – but this parishioner ended the chat with, "well, he is one of my favourite fellas".

And I guess that's why we're all here celebrating with him this weekend – because Laurie is one of our favourite fellas!

As I reflected on these Readings we've just heard – readings that Laurie has chosen for this occasion - I couldn't help but think of that conversation again....

God, too, thinks Laurie's one of his favourite fellas.

We're reminded of this in the First Reading. God promises to show constant love and mercy, to answer prayers, and to make people prosper. God only does this for his favourites and Laurie's had not just 50 years of being shown this, but the whole 75!

And then there's the familiar Gospel reading. Is it about the Prodigal Son or the Prodigal Father? And what does the word Prodigal mean anyway?

According to Webster's Dictionary it can mean wasteful, but it can also mean extravagant and is synonymous with being profuse in giving, and exceedingly abundant. So let's go with that!

The Prodigal Father shows such extravagant and abundant love to his son, even after all the disrespect and frivolous waste. He runs out to meet him even when he's a long way off. That's pretty extravagant behaviour to begin with, but then he also throws him a lavish party, a feast it says.

Such extravagant love - the same love God has shown Laurie over his lifetime, and indeed the same love God shows all of us, and even though it's Laurie's weekend of celebration, the reality is that that's how extravagant and abundant God's love is – there's more than enough for everyone. We're actually *all* God's favourite fellas and fellaettes.

This weekend, although tinged with sadness at having to say goodbye, is certainly a time of thanksgiving, and it is our extravagant God that we thank today for all the gifts that Laurie has been given, and particularly for the way he has shared them with us all.

St Paul tells us that there are many different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. We also give thanks for the gifts Laurie has seen in each of us, and the way he has allowed each of us to share them with him.

My experience of these past 6 years, working with him in this Parish has certainly shown me how Laurie lives this 2nd Reading out. He is so good at acknowledging and nurturing the different gifts each one has and then bringing them together for the good of us all, for the good of the whole Parish, and so the Spirit has been alive and well.

And so, each of us here can celebrate the gifts we have been given. Each of us can celebrate the extravagant love God gives us, each one of us can be counted as a favourite of God. But at this time and in this place we especially celebrate the gifts Laurie has been given and then shared, the extravagant love God has given him, and that he has shared with us all. Thankyou Laurie. Thankyou God.

When I had that chat with the parishioner a couple of weeks ago, she didn't actually have the final word – I did! I replied to her, "Actually, I would have to say the same, he's one of my favourite fellas too!"

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LJP' or similar, written in a cursive style.