

Homily for people and parishes...

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 3rd August 2025, Pentecost 8

Readings: Hosea 11:1-11

Colossians 3:1-11

Psalm 107:1-9, 43

Luke 12:13-21

Rachael Flynn is an Australian artist who lives on a sheep and cattle property near Mudgee, in New South Wales. She is the creator of Red Tractor Designs which produces thoughtful cards, tea towels, plates and mugs. I'm a great fan of her work and appreciate the quotes that she uses to enhance each image. I recently bought a card which portrayed a man sitting under a tree reading a book, and the quote beside him is attributed to the Roman lawyer and philosopher, Marcus Cicero.

Cicero was a deep thinker and writer who was born two thousand, one hundred and thirty-one years ago, in a city of what we now call Italy. Rachael Flynn takes the quote from a letter that Cicero sent to his friend Marcus Varro in which he affirmed that, *'If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need!'*

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My hunch is that Cicero wrote this when he was an older man – probably my age – and when I did some research I found this was the case. Cicero had retreated to his estates because he'd got on the wrong side of Caesar and in those days a wealthy household would have a library, containing many scrolls, built around a garden in which reflection and thinking could take place.

It all sounds quite lovely, but 'though I like the affirmation of reading and reflection, and of being inspired by observing plants changing through each season, I think there are important things that the quote doesn't mention!

So, I bought the card because I loved the image, then I added three things so that it makes more sense for me. The quote on my card now reads, *'If you have people to share love with, a library, a garden, and a guitar... you have everything you need!'*

In affirming these both Cicero and I have assumed that food, water, and a safe place to call home are present in a person's life before naming anything else. I think we are all conscious that for too many people in our world these essential things are absent. If we were a refugee living on one small meal a day in an overcrowded refugee camp, or a homeless person rough sleeping rough in winter, the affirmation that a library and a garden are what's really needed would sound absurd.

But, beyond the food, water, shelter, and safety elements so important for survival... what things make your life, and mine, worth living? If you had to re-write Cicero's list, what things would you include?

There's a fair chance that you would have a variation of my first element which was to have people to share love with. Life-giving relationships with family and friends... and as a person of faith, life-giving relationship with God. If we agreed that these things were the main game in life, the inevitable follow-up question for reflection would be, 'Then, how much time and energy do we invest in these things?

If we did an honest audit of where we most invest our time and energy, we may be surprised. Indeed, some of us may find that we put the majority of our time and energy into making money, acquiring possessions, and being entertained.

The entertainment element, I think, is relatively new and is hugely enabled by digital technology and social media. It's now possible to binge watch an entire television series on platforms like Netflix or Stan without pausing for adverts or interaction with people. It's possible on social media platforms like Tik-Tok, Instagram, and Facebook to spend hours looking at the lives of other people without having any interaction with them.

The inclination to focus on money and possessions, at the expense of human relationships, has probably been a challenge throughout human history... possibly focused in the question, 'How much is enough?'

The Gospel reading this weekend (Luke 12:13-21) speaks powerfully to this for it remembers Jesus stating strongly, *'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.'* Or, to paraphrase, 'It's not the size of the house, or the model of the car, or the fashion of the clothes, or how much money we have in the bank... There are more important things to life than stuff.'

Jesus then told a story so that people would remember and understand. Not surprisingly he used everyday imagery from grain production because he was speaking to people who understood this. There are many people in the Western Region today who will also resonate with this because they are growers of wheat, maize, sorghum, and corn and we can be thankful for their skill and hard work.

In his story, Jesus suggested that a wealthy man produced more grain than he could possibly need, and instead of sharing the surplus he made plans to tear down the barns he had to build bigger ones. It does sound like a valid business plan! However, Jesus continued by saying that after the wealthy man resolved to follow this plan he was told by God he would die that night, and that he had missed out on the real purpose of his life.

You might be thinking that I now have to give away my aspirations for a larger library and garden, and maybe you're right! Perhaps the challenge for me is to be content with the library and the garden I have and instead of yearning for bigger versions of these... find ways that they can enrich the relationships I have with myself, with others, and with God? How do I share my place, my home and garden?

I think the challenge of being 'rich toward God' that is expressed in the last verse of today's Gospel, is best responded to by seeking to cultivate and practice generosity and love in the unique garden of relationships we live in. I'd love to hear your thoughts about this.

Of course, one way to be nourished in our relationship with God is through prayer, so I invite you to join with me in prayer now:

Loving God, we give thanks for the way that the Gospel challenges us to think about what we value, and where we invest our time and energy. If we have become greedy for material things we ask for your Spirit to help us recalibrate, such that we value and practice kindness, generosity, and love in every aspect of our living. We ask in the name of the one who said, 'Take care!', Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**