

## Views from the Pews - Confession

Today's reading from Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 reminds us again of one of Jesus' most famous and least understood parables. Its words are so familiar that most of us will miss Jesus' point for the umpteenth time. Its central character is usually known as the Prodigal Son, even though its main message is more about the Ultimate Forgiving Father. Wrong. The turning point in the story is usually understood to be about confession, the moment when the Prodigal realises he has to admit his grave mistake and return to his father, willing to be demoted from son to servant in order to be acceptable back in his father's house. Wrong again. Try another interpretation, proposed with blinding clarity by Robert Farrar Capon in *Parables of Grace* (1988, p.140-44).

'All real confession ...is not a transaction, not a negotiation in order to secure forgiveness....Forgiveness surrounds us, beats upon all our lives; we confess only to wake ourselves up to what we already have ....We are forgiven in baptism not only for the sins committed before baptism but for a while lifetime of sins yet to come....we are forgiven before, during and after our confession of them.....not because we made ourselves forgivable or even because we had faith; we are forgiven solely because there is a Forgiver. And our one baptism for forgiveness of sins remains the lifelong sacrament, the premier sign of that fact.

'No subsequent forgiveness – no eucharist, no confession – is ever anything more than an additional sign...it was all done, once and for all, by the one God in the Person of the Word Incarnate in Jesus...we may be unable to believe it until [after our own death, when we can] finally see it, but the God who does it, like the father who forgave the prodigal, never had anything else in mind.

'The father [in the parable] puts no intermediate steps between forgiveness and celebration....he turns to his servants and, bent on nothing but the party that life in his house was always meant to be, he commands the festivities to begin. ...'Let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found''.

Capon's punchline is precious consolation for all of us doubting whether we might qualify for salvation: 'It proclaims clearly that grace operates only by raising the dead: ....[hence] the last judgement will vindicate everybody, because everybody will be dead and risen in Jesus'.

*Kim King*