



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord

Readings: Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18., Ps33, Ephesians 5: 21-32, John 6: 60-69

An old friend of mine, now long gone to glory, and an exemplar of the Christian Faith, used to say to me, 'Never mind what a man says – watch what he does. That will tell you who he really is.'

Over the years I have found that to be excellent advice in the interim assessments of others by which we live our daily lives and, from the view in the bathroom mirror, a shocking judgement on my own shortcomings and hypocrisies.

In today's Old Testament reading we meet Joshua and the People of Israel on the borders of the long-promised land. And Joshua presents them with a choice. Do they want to go back to the pagan deities of Egypt? Do they want to return to the past? If not then do they want to worship the gods of the Amorites in whose land they currently are? This significant civilisation, the builders of Babylon, had a mountain god, a shepherd king and an advanced law code so it was not unattractive. Do they want to go native?

Or do they want to stick with the Lord their God who rescued them from slavery in Egypt and set them on the long wilderness trail learning to become the People of God and to be established in a land of their own.

Joshua declares himself directly: *'As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'*

The people, inspired by this proclamation, and no doubt by the military successes of Joshua's generalship, rehearse their history of salvation and declare themselves also to be enthusiastic for the Lord. They have the highest hopes and the noblest intentions. Sadly much of their subsequent history is marked more by disobedience than fidelity.

What they say does not turn out to have much currency in action. So the history of the Old Covenant, like much of the personal lives of all sinners, turns out to be a constant falling away to judgement and a prophetic call to return to God's mercy.

Why do they (and we) so often echo the complaint of St. Paul when he says that he, all too often, finds that he doesn't do the things he should but rather ends up doing the very opposite?

The clue is given us in the simple opening prayer or Collect of this Sunday. We have just prayed, 'O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people ***to love what you command and to desire what you promise***, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity

of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.' These are simple but profound petitions.

Note first the solidarity and absolute unity and conviction of the People of God under Joshua. These, we understand, are not incidentals but providentials. They are gifts of God and they are given to a people utterly committed to the divine plan of salvation. Our minds are to be constantly open to the sovereign purposes of God. This is the unifying single purpose.

Then, we pray, that God will grant us to 'love what He commands'.

Obvious, I know, but in my experience we tend to end up doing what we like, if at all possible. So, if we are to be faithful to God and utterly fulfilled as His people then we need to LOVE His commandments. We need to be passionate about His laws, knowing that they are the gift of a loving Father and for the ultimate good of Man. If we love His commands then we will have no trouble keeping them.

Then the prayer pleads that we may desire what He promises. That means we have to truly grasp, even with our own inadequate imaginations, the glory and peace and wonder of eternal life with Him. Our hearts must be stretched out with longing for this unspeakable mercy, the salvation of our little frail humanity. Only thus, the prayer reminds us, can our hearts be fixed where true joys can be found. Where our heart is, Jesus tells us, is where our treasure is. So we must live as people with our feet firmly on the ground taking each next step along the pilgrim road to the Promised Land. And while we have our feet on the ground we must have our hearts in Heaven.

With our hearts in Heaven we will have the divine perspective, the sense of common purpose, the love of God's ways and the passionate desire for His promises for ourselves and for all men that fuels the Gospel mission that storm the citadels of wickedness and lead us home in triumph to the Jerusalem which is above.

Decide whom you will serve this day.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

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