



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Faire sans Dire

Readings: Ezekiel 18: 25-28, Ps 25, Philippians 2: 1-11, Matthew 21: 28-32

My old and much beloved Alma Mater, Tiffin School, has a motto. It is in French and it reads simply, 'FAIRE SANS DIRE'. For those not benefiting from a classical education it means simply, 'To do without to say' or, more crudely put, 'Shut up and get on with it.'

As something of a chatterbox, *plus ça change* (that's more French – you can't complain about the lack of erudition in these homilies), I was always happy to do but the 'without to say' bit I found rather difficult.

Here in this morning's Gospel we see Jesus teaching about this whole area of both faithful activity, discretion and obedience.

Two sons are asked by the Father to go and work in the vineyard. One refuses but later goes and does it. The other verbally obliged his Father but never went to do the job. Jesus is clearly not impressed by big mouths. Elsewhere he tells His disciples that 'not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven but those who do the will of my Father who is in Heaven'. And at the Last Judgement in Matthew 25 He disappoints some

of the 'faithful' who have talked a good game but not actually delivered 'on the park'. They never did what they said they would. All talk and no action.

Now let's be clear, neither of these lads is the ideal son. We may be used, in the decadent West, to surly children refusing obedience to a parent but such behaviour would have been truly shocking in Jesus' time, as indeed it is still to many of our immigrant communities here. The verbally disobedient son is disrespectful and literally 'disgraceful' in his response. But, Jesus tells us, he reflects on his disobedience and, the Greek text literally means, 'he changes what he has in his heart'. There is a profound shift in his being. He does not unsay his rudeness but demonstrates his repentance by his action.

He ends up doing the will of the Father. His verbal assent may be lacking but his life becomes the evidence of his respect and obedience and love.

His slick brother is charming. He is immediately responsive, plays the game of respect and uses highly ingratiating terms to his Father, calling him 'Lord'. Perfect response but, tragically, that's where it stops. No action ensues. It's all 'gob', no heart.

Jesus then asks his questioners which of the two brothers did the Father's will. There is, as far as I am aware, no Greek equivalent of a 'no-brainer'. Jesus is underlining to his hearers, down all the centuries, the importance of our actual obedience. It's not enough to verbally conform or have our doctrine watertight, though both are laudable. We need to be following through in action. There has to be an integrity to who we are, what we say and what we do.

Many years ago when we were first starting out on the Christian pilgrimage a wonderful, joyful and saintly woman called Mary Henry was a real inspiration to us. A committed Christian, she was love in action and an immensely practical person who got the best out of everybody because she tried to see them as God saw them. I remember her saying to us, very early on, 'Never mind what a man says. Look at what he actually does and then you will know who he really is.'

It is a terrifyingly accurate formula that never fails – not least when I look in the bathroom mirror. I have always found it to be true.

You will listen to people saying they love their kids to bits but do little or nothing to truly care for their physical, spiritual or moral wellbeing. Others will affirm their rectitude and desire to be there defending the faith but never to be found on the barricades. Many will heartily affirm the importance of the Father's will but neither carry it out nor encourage others to do so.

All these categories, and our own shortcomings, are part of that modern self-indulgence of emotional incontinence. We like to make the right noises and be heard to do so. Jesus is quite clear. That won't do.

In fact he tells His questioners that whores and tax exploiters who have repented will be entering Heaven ahead of the impenitent, verbally obedient but practically disobedient goody two shoes.

Ideally we should assent verbally and act willingly. Where we have failed we need to exercise that 'changing of what we have in our hearts' and get on with the task in hand.

Faire sans Dire – shut up and get on with it.

Don't tell me you love me – Show me you love me.

Or to go back to Mary Henry, 'If you want to know who a man is, never mind what he says LOOK AT WHAT HE ACTUALLY DOES.'

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