



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **29th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B**

### ***The world turned upside down***

*Readings: Isaiah 53: 10-11, Ps 32, Hebrews 4: 14-16, Mark 10: 35-45*

Ambition is a very strange business. When you are small people often ask you what you want to be when you grow up.

I was sometimes asked, by my critics, what I wanted to be if I **ever** grew up.

When I was a little boy I wanted to be, successively, a jockey – curious because I have never ridden. Then a doctor – unfortunately I was rubbish at physics and chemistry. Next, an actor – got into the National Youth Theatre but couldn't stomach loquaciousness and the superficial company of those whose primary talent is pretending to be someone else. Then politics – unfortunately I couldn't find a party whose philosophy I could wholeheartedly assent to.

When God finally sprang this surprise on me I saw it as a tribute to his amazing tolerance and sense of humour. Accepting His mercy I have never had a moment of regret or wanting to do anything else (though I would quite like to have written the definitive novel about the Grail in my spare time.)

Ambition is a funny thing. I remember years ago sitting at an Anglican Diocesan Synod listening to a young clergyman giving a toe curlingly sycophantic speech in his desperation for office. Next to me sat an elderly vicar who leaned over and vouchsafed, 'There is nothing quite so revolting as the sight of naked ambition in a young clergyman.'

And he was right. This is clearly the response of the other disciples to the backstairs shenanigans of James and John.

The word 'ambition' comes from a Latin root meaning to go round canvassing, drumming up support for your personal cause. In the Gospel today we see James and John going straight to the Boss and importuning Him for appointment to high office. 'If you're going to be King then we would like to be Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary.'

They have no idea that the Kingdom will be inaugurated on Calvary and the throne will be a Cross. They cannot have envisaged three centuries of persecution and martyrdom for the loyal subjects of the King of kings. Their ambition is personal and it is divisive and corrupting and Jesus has to nip it in the bud.

A priest who longs to be a bishop or keeps a pair of purple socks in his bottom drawer is a menace. We are, all of us, clergy and laity alike, to be of a different order. Our ambition is to be not for ourselves but for the Kingdom. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be the best at our given task that you truly can be but it must be a hallmark of our desire to serve - not to lord it over others and receive applause, adulation and envy in equal measure.

The Pope enjoys many titles but, for my money, the greatest of his titles is 'The Servant of the servants of God.'

The model of a monarchical papacy is to reflect the monarchy of the Servant King whom he represents as Vicar of Christ. The Holy Father is there to serve the world by his fidelity and his defence and Spirit- inspired interpretation of the Traditio, the Word of God and the consistent teaching authority of the Church. He is there to minister to his fellow apostles throughout the world, as Peter, leading and encouraging, strengthening the faithful. This is his magnificent service.

Those apostles, in their turn, minister as servants to their dioceses and their parish priests who in turn are there to serve the Body of Christ in the parishes. Those parishes are servants to their community, ministering the truth of the Faith and, in their evangelisation, seeking to bring all men into the joy and glorious freedom of the Kingdom of God. At every turn it is a ministry of service.

The Christian model of leadership is, as St. Paul often relates, 'the world turned upside down'. And it is so because it must follow Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our Faith.

God has become Man in Jesus Christ. Almighty God condescended to our humanity in order to save us, in order to lift us up to His divinity and eternity. It follows that the Church, His Body on earth, has to be a sacrificial, loving servant that walks in another man's shoes, not out of a misguided attempt at pious social work, but as a way of showing him the way home to the God who loves him and came to die for him on Calvary. We are not to be ambitious for ourselves but for the Gospel.

We are to go around canvassing (ambitio) for Jesus not for our own ego. What we want to be when we grow up, as Christians, is to grow into the full stature of Jesus Christ, to be like Him.

When Jesus, on Maundy Thursday, kneels before His disciples and washes their feet, He exemplifies our task – there to wash the feet of the weary Jerusalem bound pilgrim and teach them service in the shadow of the Cross and show them the promise of glory in the light of the miracle of the Third Day.

Our ambition is to bring the lost and the lapsed home to Jesus. To do this they will need to recognise, in each of us, the Servant King.

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