



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

17th Sunday Year C

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

Readings: Genesis 18: 20-32, Ps 137, Colossians 2: 12-14, Luke 11: 1-13

Those who have read today's readings in preparation for Mass will, no doubt, be expecting a detailed critique of the sins of Sodom.

As 'the sanctification of sodomy' legislation passes through Parliament, that would not be a bad guess. While our elected representatives are busy tearing up the fundamental understandings of marriage, apparently ignorant of basic biology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, theology and almost any other 'ology' you care to name, we need to resolutely oppose them. But we also need to understand our much more fundamental position in the scheme of things and it is to that, this evening, that I must therefore turn.

Abraham, 'our father in faith' as the Canon of the Mass rightly describes him, is outside the walls of Sodom. It is a place where his cousin, Lot, and his male relatives will, in a short while, have to barricade themselves in to avoid being raped by the town mob.

God has told Abraham that He is about to destroy this city for its wickedness and today's passage sees Abraham in one of the strangest episodes of the Old Testament. In it the patriarch appears to negotiate with the Almighty for the salvation of the city.

He holds no brief for the wicked nor for their sins but he appeals to the justice of God on behalf of the righteous. Suppose there were fifty righteous, he begins. Would God not spare the city for their sake? Shall not the judge of the earth do what is right?

God is a just God, therefore Abraham appeals for justice. God agrees and promises Abraham to spare the city if fifty can be found. There then proceeds a tortuous negotiation betwixt the Lord and His servant. What if only 45 were there? What if only 40? 30? 20?

At each stage the God of righteousness agrees that the city will be spared if Abraham can muster the promised number of the righteous. The presence of the righteous will turn away the judgement of God.

Finally, with much fear and trembling, Abraham plays his final bid. What if only ten righteous could be found? This figure, bear in mind, is the minimum required for a congregation to be quorate in Judaism. So it truly is minimal.

The Judge of all solemnly pronounces that, for the sake of the smallest number of the righteous, He will spare the city.

Sodom is utterly ignorant of this conversation. It has no respect for the righteous, as subsequent chapters reveal. It has no intention of repenting.

This extraordinary story goes right to the heart of the ministry of the Church in the midst of a sinful and disobedient society/city/kingdom. Like Abraham we are to intercede for those who, as yet, neither know God nor their need of His mercy.

We appeal to a justice that is divine. It is not, like that of pagan gods, unknowable, arbitrary and cruel. It is a justice born of love for fallen Man, a desire for the repentance, reconciliation and restoration of the sinner. It is not vindictive but redemptive.

We see, in Abraham's intercession, a growing understanding of God's desire for Man's salvation. We witness the amazing negotiation stop at 'ten righteous' men, a minimal congregation whose holiness will yet stay the hand of the Almighty.

We live in an even greater dispensation where the negotiation, on God's own initiative, has come down to One Righteous Man whose Presence can yet forestall the unimpeachable judgement of God on sinful Man. That One Righteous Man is, of course, Jesus the Christ. For His sake the true and deserved sentence that falls on all sinners is turned away.

But....and there is a 'but'. They/We have to repent and receive it.

They/We have to enter that little but universal quorum of the faithful that is the Church. And as part of the Body of the only truly Righteous One, we have to continue to intercede for the Cities of the Plain that they may yet turn back to God. That is pretty much where we find ourselves today in a society which has wholesale rejected God, overturned His laws in the human court of Parliament and reverted to good old fashioned idolatry, the worship of matter and material things.

The heart of God, as Abraham reveals and Jesus gloriously and profligately confirms, is always for the salvation of Man. The Church's heart must be the

same. But she must never cease to warn, to prophesy and to proclaim the ultimate cost of Man's rejection of this Divine love.

In Sodom, as we discover and tragically, Abraham's heartfelt negotiation and intercession is in vain. The wretched vicious (vice fuelled) city cannot even muster the ten just men.

The archaeology tells us that, under the natural asphalt and prosperous bitumen factories, the tectonic plates shifted just enough to ignite the escaping methane and the cities of the plain were carbonised. To quote the Bible, 'fire and brimstone rained and the smoke went up from the land like a furnace.'

In the courts and parliaments and communities of a once Christian continent, the laws of God have, one by one, been ignored or repealed – blasphemy, abolition of the Sabbath, degrading of child-parent relations, murder of the innocent, blessing of adultery, an economy built on coveting, the idolatry of man. We have travelled a long way in a lifetime.

The tectonic plates are shifting under our continent.

Only Christ in His Body can intercede.

Only repentance can now avert judgement.

Only the Church can plead the presence of the Righteous One for the mercy of God.

We are in prayerful negotiation for the future of our civilisation.