



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

21st Sunday Year C

The Lord trains up those he loves

Readings: Isaiah 66: 18-21, Ps 116, Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13, Luke 13: 22-30

'Do not be discouraged when God reprimands you. The Lord trains up those he loves and disciplines those who are His children'

Mr. T was a 'spanker'. He was also a Scoutmaster, a leading Freemason and, for his sins, my Maths teacher. Hence my acquaintance with him as an enthusiastic disciplinarian of the old school. When Mr. T spoke to me of Trigonometry or Calculus, he might as well have been speaking in High Mandarin.

Which was unfortunate because the regular Wednesday Maths Test resulted, for those who scored less than 70%, in firm discipline. A near miss would result in Mr. T lifting up your desk lid with your hair on one side of it and your head on the other. After a minute or two of excruciating pain large sections of the forehead would become completely numb and no doubt led to some premature receding hairlines among my fellow duffers. The no-hopers, with 50% or less, (usually Stephen B. Davis and me) would shuffle miserably forward, bend over the desk while the keen student of the Marquis de Sade covered our bottoms with chalk dust from the board rubber and then proceeded to beat our pants clean with a whippy plimsoll for as many strokes as it took.

(For those of you already reminiscing about the rigours of Catholic boarding schools I should say that this was a secular state day school and Mr. T seemed to be the lone representative there of this curious hobby.)

Strange to relate, for all the attention I received from Mr. T's regular Wednesday discipline, my chastened backside made me no more receptive to the mysteries of CoSin or Tan than I had been before.

It did, however, leave me with a lasting aversion to Wednesdays.

Mr. B, on the other hand, who never laid a finger on me, caused me far more regular pain than Mr. T ever did. Mr. B was our sports coach. He ran us like dogs in Cross Country. We did training circuits 'til we could hardly crawl. We rowed in weather you might have expected to see a Polar Bear on a passing ice floe, as Mr B shouted us on from the bank. One day he rode straight into the river still roaring at us as his megaphone went under the wash. And we rugby tackled 'til our shoulders ached from the impact and our team colours were a sea of mud. He never spared himself physically either.

In terms of punishment it was no contest. Mr. B won hands down.

The difference was that while Mr. T was regarded, among the more generous assessments, as an 'iffy perv', Mr. B was loved by even the halt and the lame. One man enjoyed punishing the boys for its own sake.

The other man disciplined the same raw pack of young men with expectation, encouragement, enthusiasm and a palpable desire for them to achieve the very highest of which they were capable.

Mr. T was regarded as capricious and cruel. Mr. B was consistent and, beyond all the verbal 'railroading', truly fond of his young men.

Mr. T was a petty nuisance and a bit of a joke. Mr. B was a real father figure to the boys and one of the kindest and most generous men I have ever known.

Today's epistle tells us that we are God's sons and that He will, like a good and loving father, when necessary, tell us off, correct us, punish us, train us up, encourage us.

He will never be a Mr. T, beating us for His own peculiar pleasure. But He will never turn aside and fail to train us up. He will never say, 'Oh, well. Never mind. Don't bother.....because I'm not bothered either.'

Who we become matters to Him.

Like the true Father that He is He will always be consistent. He will keep to His Word. He will not leave us to fail or thrash us for our inadequacy. He will encourage, train, discipline us out of a love that has embraced us little fragile bits of dust and, in Christ, claimed us as His children.

So, the epistle writer tells us, we must never be downhearted when God disciplines us. It is a sure sign that we are His precious sons and daughters walking in the way of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

'He disciplines us for our good that we may share in His holiness.'

Olympic athletes don't win medals by watching sport on the telly. Spiritual athletes don't become Christ-like by reading pamphlets on holiness.

Both undergo the disciplines of true discipleship and sometimes, even for the greatest champions and the greatest saints, it's an unbelievably hard and painful slog.

But if we want to be part of the victory parade then, wounded, weak, exhausted, we press on to the finishing line with our hand in the hand of Jesus and the sweet words of the Father's encouragement ringing in our ears.

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