



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **All Saints**

***One, holy, catholic and apostolic***

*Readings: Wisdom 11: 22-12:2*

Turning on my wireless randomly yesterday mid morning I found myself at the beginning of the daily service. The lady conducting the proceedings enthusiastically reminded me that 'we' were celebrating 'Reformation Day'!

It was, you recall, on All Hallows Eve 1517 that the chubby little friar nailed his Theses to the door in Wittenburg and began a violent rift in the family of Christ which has never healed. No doubt someone in the BBC is already advanced in the plans for celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this great sock in the eye for the Catholic Church.

The problem with Luther, of course, was not that he was wrong to call the unpleasant practices of Tetzal to account nor to seek the reform of the Church. We know in our own day and from our historical studies that there have been many times when the Church has stood in need of reform. While she is, as the Bride of Christ, unfailingly holy yet she is made up on earth of sinners seeking sanctification.

There have been many occasions when reform has beckoned with the hand of God, from St. Paul's letters to the mission of St. Francis to the Councils of our own time. We are, by the grace of God, constantly being reformed and remade in the image of Christ. The problem with Luther was that his call for reform, as so many individualistic calls for holiness, did not escalate into a renewal but degenerated into heresy and schism. Heresy can be corrected, Schism seldom heals.

Within five years of his initial challenge to the authority of the Church Luther had sided with the aristocracy against the Peasants' Revolt, a revolt which had simply followed his example of challenge to bad authority. But....seeing which side his bread was buttered Luther exhorted the nobles to put down the devilish rebels like mad dogs. 'let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a **rebel**'.

Ironic coming from Luther....

The man who claimed supreme authority for the Bible then developed his whole teaching on it by adding a word to a central text thereby utterly distorting its meaning. He was also thoroughly in favour of editing out those bits of God's Word which did not suit him, from Maccabees to the Epistle of James.

As his rebellion deepened so he became more and more distant from the charity of God. He rounded on the Jews. These 'venomous people', 'liars', were the 'devil's people'. Their synagogues should be burnt

down, their rabbis impounded, their books fed to the flames. Indeed, he went on, 'we are wrong not to kill them'. Curiously enough this jolly text was processed in a glass case at every Nuremberg Rally and, far from coincidentally, Kristallnacht was performed on the eve of Luther's birthday. The Lutheran Church only finally disowned this poisonous volume in the 1980s.

Why am I telling you all this on All Saints' Day?

Because of the supreme contrast between this radical and disordered individualism and the Catholic Church.

We celebrate the Saints. Why? Because we are part of the same family of faith. We are in the process of becoming, by the grace of God, saints ourselves, though you and I may never make the General Calendar. The Church teaches us that we are not divided by death. We remain united in Christ. We love and long for their prayers. In the Eucharistic prayer we say of the saints, 'on whose constant intercession in your Presence we rely for unfailing help'.

We are not divided in belief. We say the same Creed, subscribe to the same Catechism, hold our communion with the same bishop in apostolic order who derives his authority and place from Christ Himself through His Vicar on earth.

All Saints' Day reminds us that we are the Church. It reminds us that we are ONE. We are not a hundred thousand buzzing and dissenting sectaries.

We are HOLY because of Christ and in the business of becoming holy ourselves and reforming, through repentance and penance, the Church on earth.

We are APOSTOLIC because we hold absolutely in unbroken line to the teaching and authority of those to whom Jesus Himself gave both in eternity.

We are CATHOLIC because we are universal, for all mankind. We are not followers of Luther or Calvin or Marcion or Arius or Pelagius or any other of the splinterers of Christendom. We are followers of Jesus.

We are not just part of the same team – We are family and we belong together in time and in eternity.

So I'm afraid I had to turn down that kind lady's invitation to celebrate Reformation Day. I could not rejoice at the pattern of dissent, division, deformation of doctrine and disaster that has followed in its wake.

With the Church of Jesus Christ I celebrate the Holiness of God and His unfailing call to press on with the path of sanctification, in truth and love and unity, as exemplified in the Saints and celebrated on the altars of His Church and in the hearts of His people.