



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

6th Sunday of Easter Year A

People prefer to listen to witnesses

Readings: Acts 17: 22-31, Psalm 66, 1 Peter 3:15-18, John 14: 15-21

I am holding in my hands a simple translation of a personal letter to each one of us from our Holy Father, the Pope. It is part of our instruction for the tasks that daily confronts us when we go from Mass into the world that Christ came to save. He says this....

‘First of all, above all, reverence Jesus Christ in your hearts as the holy Lord of all.

Secondly, always be ready to give an account of your faith to those who ask you. Why you believe in Jesus and have hope of everlasting life. Always do this graciously, courteously and with respect.

Thirdly make sure your life matches up to your faith so that no-one can accuse you of hypocrisy. What you say and what you do and who you are should be a complete integrity.’

Of course the Pope I am quoting is not Francis but St. Peter himself. It is what he says to the Church in the second lesson read to us this morning and it is the key to the mission of the Church.

First of all we hold Jesus in our hearts as Lord. This is not an intellectual assent, though it is that too, it is a relationship born of profound love and recognition. Twenty Centuries later the successor of Peter, Francis I, writes this, 'I invite all Christians, everywhere to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord". The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace".

His predecessor, Benedict XVI, wrote this, 'Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea but the encounter with an event, a person (Jesus) who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.'

His predecessor Pope St. John –Paul II wrote that 'we must continually evangelise ourselves', that is renew our living relationship with Jesus, if we are to carry out 'the foremost task of the Church' – that is mission.

Paul VI wrote, in the great document on evangelisation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 'People prefer to listen to witnesses'. We need to be, therefore, 'evangelisers who speak of a God whom they themselves know and are familiar with, AS IF THEY WERE SEEING HIM.'

The message is the same today as it was in the early Church. The mainspring of mission is our relationship with Our Lord.

We may encounter Him in adoring the Blessed Sacrament, in a heartfelt and well prepared confession, in our study of His word, in the depth of personal prayer but encounter Him we must if we are to fulfil His calling to us to be the Church, the mission station of salvation for all mankind.

The second thing we are asked, by St. Peter, to do is this. Be prepared to give an account of the reason for our hope.

That is a profound question and one we should give some time to in prayer. Take this as your homework this week.

If someone asked you to say simply what you believe and why, what would you say? Take a notepad. Write it down. Remember what has led you to this place. Discover the areas when you still need help and encouragement and ask for it. Familiarise yourself with what you know.

Set yourself this task: You are at the bedside of a dying friend who is a non-believer and he turns to you and asks you simply, 'What is it that convinces you that this is not the end?'

When you have begun to answer him you will see that, as the Church, we are often at the bedside of a dying humanity that can often only dimly recall the question. The destiny of one and all depends on our faithful witness. Our witness must be gracious, courteous, loving and respectful.

Finally the witness of our words must be matched by our lives. The witness of mean, careless, arrogant lives will be dismissed as hypocrisy.

When Moses encountered God he returned shining with His glory.

When we encounter Christ something of the radiance of His glory should shine through us and be observable to those to whom we witness. The joy of the Gospel is not a modern idea but an eternal reality to which we are called and which we must pass on.

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