



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B**

### ***Nous sommes Jesus***

*Readings: 1 Samuel 3: 3-10, 19, Ps39, 1 Corinthians 6: 13-15, 17-20, John 1: 35-42*

It is not often that I change the habits of a lifetime. It is important to remain with the lectionary texts to avoid deviating from the disciplines of the common liturgy of the Church and avoids the temptation to avoid riding personal hobbyhorses down the nave.

Today, however, the Church invites us to do two things, for which the Lectionary does not fully provide. It begins the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – that often tired rehearsal of distant longings started so hopefully by American Anglican Friars of the Atonement, converted to Catholicism, and now to be found in the quixotic beauty of the Church of Saint Onofrio on the Janiculum – a fabulous view over the Eternal City.

It also invites us to celebrate Peace Sunday. This in a week which has seen both the burial of the victims of the Paris terror and the Holy Father offering anyone who insults his mother a 'knuckle sandwich'.

How are we to respond to these immense challenges and contradictions? As I have the luxury of being with you next week I propose to take one at a time. Peace.....

Last week several million people, heads of state and the full panoply of power turned out to mourn the dozen or so victims of the sudden vicious assault by Islamic terrorists on the offices of a little read satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo (About 10% of Private Eye circulation).

The crime of the victims was, inter alia, to print cartoons of Mohammed. In a deeply iconoclastic religion this is strictly forbidden. Much of the mourning was taken up with a personal identification with those murdered ('Je suis Charlie') and endless animated debates, in the media, about the 'right to offend' other people.

Two things, I suggest, would have struck a non-European or American. It has taken only a dozen deaths in a European capital to mobilise such anguish. For the last twenty years the third world has suffered hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of displacements at the hands of the same militant philosophy while the West has turned a blind eye and continued to cosy up to the paymasters of terror who ensure our energy supplies.

The second thing, for our visiting friend, would be a frank astonishment at this newly conceived 'doctrine of insult'. It does not exist. Under most law I do not have the right to provoke another human being to the point where he lashes out. I may not use religious or racial contempt.

Our problem as Christians in a secular Europe is that we are now governed by politicians and media who understand neither their history, nor their legal origins, nor the careful interweaving of both by the Christian Faith they have so cavalierly abandoned in favour of materialism and libertarianism.

We have singularly failed to defend our fellow believers in the third world and now we are in danger of confusing 'free speech' and democratic process for the 'right to be rude'.

The attack on the rights of free speech began effectively with the Satanic Verses affair. Could a novelist criticise the violent and tyrannical regime of the Ayatollah and ask legitimate questions about the religious foundations of his theology? The answer was 'No' from the Islamic community and the man who led the march of thousands of them is now Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, Keith Vaz.

Christianity takes a simple view on unpleasantness and incitement. St. Paul writes in Ephesians, 'Guard against foul talk. Let your words be for the improvement of others. Do good to your listeners. Do not call each other names or indulge in spitefulness.'

And, if we are insulted, Paul reminds, us in Romans 15, 'The words of Scripture apply to Christ; the insults of those who insult you fall on me.' That being said we have a duty to the truth and to open rational debate. We must resist, at all costs, the imposition of a tyranny, be it secular or religious, which says we cannot debate reality.

For Islam this is problematical because to question the veracity of its texts, its history or its origins is a terminal offence. To convert from Islam is to invite capital punishment. To be Jew or Christian under Sharia is to be a second class citizen, unequal as a witness in court, subject to extra taxation as protection money.

To get Muslim friends to understand that this is unacceptable in our culture is difficult. I have been in a mosque where the book CRUCIFIXION was being sold. It spells out that Christianity is based on an orchestrated lie. If I had a similar book at the back of our church about Islam it would be considered dangerously offensive. There is little room for dialogue, as St. Francis discovered many centuries ago and, with the rise of extremism, the ground is shrinking yet.

As Christians we must never waver from the truth of our faith. We must never seek to insult the other man but, at the same time we must be clear that well intentioned free speech and courteous dialogue will not be stopped by the threat of violence, whatever its source. Most of us do not want to kill each other's children and friendship and truth may yet be the great weapons of peace. Few of us, of any faith, would wish to live under the totalitarianism that is now spawning. Our fathers fought one kind and we together must now fight another.

The urgency of our task is no less than the reconversion of Europe for, without Christ, I'm afraid there is no way a decadent materialistic and largely atheistic continent will stand before what is coming.

'Je ne suis pas Charlie. Nous sommes Jesus.'

I am not Charlie. WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST.

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