



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

### **32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B**

***We brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out of it***

*Readings: 1 Kings 17: 10-16, Ps 145, Hebrews 9: 24-28, Mark 12: 38-44*

I have seldom given much time to reflecting on the rise and fall of the great West African kingdom of Mali but a rare BBC educational programme brought me up short recently.

My geography is so dire that I could not have put a pin in the map at the right spot nor could I have instinctively told you that it was the seat of the nigh on legendary and deeply evocative Timbuktu.

I certainly did not know of its extraordinary medieval expansion fuelled by the enormous reserves of gold and salt. Indeed a fourteenth century Catalan atlas pictures the Emperor, Mansa Musa, holding a golden nugget in his hand the size of a grapefruit. So great was the gold wealth that overproduction threatened devaluation and, when Mansa Musa went on hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca he was accompanied by 60,000 servants and flunkeys and 200 camels laden with gold. He is rumoured to have stopped every Friday to endow a new mosque as he travelled. (Rather like the modern Saudis). It is now one of the poorest countries in the world.

All this rolled over my consciousness just as I was making final adjustments to my personal post-mortem arrangements.

The fall of such a mighty empire built on gold made my plans to have all my worldly goods transformed into 'readies' and buried with me under twenty foot of concrete seem rather futile. Perhaps Jesus, or whoever said it, was right, 'You can't take it with you'.

Then lo and behold, up pops today's gospel where Our Lord seems to value more highly the truly pitiful offering of some widowed pauper than the very considerable public endowment of a noteworthy benefactor. It is a timely reminder that 'we brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out of it'.

However much 'spondulicks' we accumulate during this earthly sojourn, we all die poor. We all die utterly dependent on the mercy of God.

The answer to St. Augustine's question, 'What do we have that we were not given?' is 'Absolutely nothing.'

Ramming the coffin with grave goods or executing fancy tax dodges does not in any way reduce the utter poverty in which we will all pass from this life to the next. It does not matter how many laden camels precede us in the procession to our obsequies, the Lord is not impressed.

So, given that we are, most of us, neither indigent widows nor multi-millionaires, where does this Gospel leave us?

What matters here is the heart. What matters here is where our treasure is stored. What matters is how we steward the gifts of creation. What matters is the sacrifice.

It is our duty to give of our time and our talents and our wealth, be they little or great, sacrificially to the work of the Lord's mercy.

How do we realistically measure this?

One of the simplest measures is the old Biblical tithe - ten per cent of our disposable income. Judging by the amount of literature I get advising my age group of expensive holidays and the number of Christmas letters from friends who seem to have three or four of these a year, there is, in my generation at least, quite a lot of slack before there is any pain.

It is our duty to consider our circumstances each year before God and make dutiful and then sacrificial provision for the mission and ministry of His Church and the works of Mercy through its agencies of charity and aid.

It may seem strange to be talking about giving on this Remembrance Sunday but then giving is at the heart of it. They gave their lives for the maintenance of Christian civilisation against the forces of darkness. We are asked to give our lives too though, for the moment more pacifically. But that does not mean our ardour should be the less, our commitment less than total and the sacrifice of our commonwealth less substantial.

When Jesus stands by the Temple treasury, He is observing a fundamental truth. The rich man put in 'what he had to spare'. The widow put in what she had. God in Christ Jesus is retailing to us the spiritual lessons of the human heart. God knows real generosity when He sees it. He knows because He is about to offer all He has for us on the Cross. We know that this astonishing and total sacrifice has a reward that never ends. It is what we celebrate in the mystery of the Mass.

We know it as surely as that dying widow and her son gave all they had to Elijah and found that, in giving, they would receive an unending blessing and the gift of life.

By the treasury of the Temple of the heart Jesus waits daily for our sacrifice to respond to His.

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