



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter – Year C**

***Take care not to find yourself fighting against God***

*Readings: Acts 5: 27-32, 40-41, Ps 29, Ap 5: 11-14, John 21: 1-19*

It is bad enough that the Catholic Church in England still limps, fifty years on, under its choice of the flabby Jerusalem Bible translation for missal readings but it becomes even worse when the lectionary editor reduces the meaning of a passage by injudicious use of the red pen. Today is a case in point.

In the Acts of the Apostles reading you will note that there are some verses missing. Let me fill the important gap.

The Apostles have been preaching in the streets of Jerusalem and within the Temple boundaries proclaiming Jesus as the Risen Lord and converting thousands. The implications for the religious and political authorities are potentially grave. They, after all, bear the largest responsibility for the death of Jesus and are now, understandably, concerned that His rag- tag remnant may be putting together a possible insurrectionary movement – the very reason they wanted Jesus dead in the first place. They have already arrested Peter and John for healing and preaching in the name of Jesus. The Apostles have ignored the warnings and continued to preach. The authorities have jailed them and the angel of the Lord has freed them.

Once more the Apostles are arrested and brought before the Court. They are warned again in no uncertain terms of the consequences of their actions.

Peter simply repeats the claims of Jesus and tells the Sanhedrin Court that, if it comes to a choice between being obedient to Man or to God, it's a 'no contest'.

Here comes the edit..... *'They were so infuriated that they wanted to put them to death'*

What happens next is providential. The great Rabbi, Gamaliel, asks for a private session of the Council. He then reminds his brethren that they have a long experience of phoney messiahs and rabble rousers. They have all failed. Gamaliel advises that they let this movement run its course. If it is of God then it will thrive, if not it will vanish like morning mist. And in a little clue to what the great man himself may be thinking, he adds, *'Take care not to find yourself fighting against God'*.

Why does this matter? First because that extraordinary intervention saves the Apostolic body from destruction and guarantees the survival of the Church. Secondly we learn later that the great convert Apostle, Paul, was once a young student of this legendary teacher. The Providence of God is at work in a way the Apostles could not, at the time, have fully understood. They were simply prepared to be faithful whatever the cost.

The second edit is relatively trivial but equally puzzling.

We are told that, having been warned again, the Apostles were released and *'were glad to have suffered humiliation for the sake of the name'*.

You will look in vain in your missal for evidence of the humiliation. That is because the hapless editor has removed a vital Greek word. The full text tells us that the Apostles were warned and released – *having been flogged*.

The Apostles were taken outside and given a good thrashing like common criminals to teach them a lesson. These men who, so recently, had been falling out with one another about who would have the best jobs at the court of King Jesus were now rejoicing that they could suffer like their Risen Lord. They were publicly humiliated, the actual word is 'dishonoured'. Yet they rejoiced to suffer for the Name of Jesus. What a turnaround. They did not care what men thought of them and they did not care what men did to them because they knew the road to Calvary and they knew the truth of the Resurrection. That is the confidence of their Faith and ours and the fuel of the Mission of the Church.

*'Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ Our Lord'* – as that famous pupil of Gamaliel later wrote.

Like the Apostles, when we were immature in faith, we joined for the triumph. We thought little of the humiliation. Like them we have to learn that the Victory Road is often the Via Dolorosa but it continues through the Road to Emmaus and to the four corners of the Earth and to wherever the Bread is broken on the highway to the heavenly Jerusalem.

When we were young we could scarcely conceive of a society in which Christianity was held in contempt. We could not have imagined our children being treated as oddballs by their peers or our own confession being held up to regular contempt by the fashionable atheism of a hostile

media. We could not have dreamt of our adoption societies being closed by evil governments for failure to comply with perverse laws or those in the noble profession of medicine being marginalised or removed for respecting the sanctity of life and keeping the Hippocratic Oath. Our forefathers would have thought it incredible that businesses that honour the Faith could be crippled by the imposition of corrupt law and a persecutory judiciary. Yet we suffer as nothing beside the sufferings of our brothers and sisters across the world who are being harried, expelled, robbed, beaten, murdered or made refugee by the growing forces of darkness masquerading as sacred or proudly secular.

If we are to follow the Apostles then we will suffer humiliation, like Our Lord before us. But we can only do so if we are a community of deep joy, because we know the truth, because we have glimpsed Heaven.

That alone can give us the confidence to confront the world, in all its sinful brokenness and frailty, and love it homeward by preaching and teaching and living the Name – Jesus Christ - and proclaiming His Gospel of salvation.

Whatever humiliation we may suffer on the Way will simply bring us closer to the God who became Man for our sake and in whose risen and transformed humanity lies our eternal hope.