



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C**

***If your faith was the size of a mustard seed...***

*Readings: Habakkuk 1: 2-3; 2:2-4, Is 94, 2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14, Luke 17: 5-10*

About three weeks ago a very dear lay friend of mine telephoned me to complain. (For once in my life and to my considerable relief it was not about me....). He had been at his parish church, as ever, when the visiting supply priest preached in the following terms. I paraphrase.

‘The bishop’s evangelisation project was a personal hobby about which we did not need to get too enthusiastic. It did not require us to go out there and tell people about Jesus. We simply needed to be our own lovely selves and go about our daily business with a smile on our face.’

As it happened I know the priest in question and he is neither a bad man nor a fool. In my experience he has been a kind man and a good pastor. None of these virtues absolves him from the charge of talking ‘nonsense on stilts’ and his erroneous teaching, in this case, is part of a culture that has seen massive decline in the discipling of our people and a flight from the sacramental life and the practice of the Presence.

I have two problems with the homily, as reported.

First it is the duty of the priest to carry out the ministry of the Apostle in his parish – especially when that Apostle is repeating the injunction to the Church of every Apostle from Peter and Paul to our present bishops.

Second, while I have no objection to smiling (in moderation of course) we must note that, with no further articulation, it might be mistaken for philosophical inanity or the prelude to a bout of flatulence. In any case SMILING *per se* has not produced the goods.

The other thing that upset my friend was the priest's reception in the coffee room after Mass. People were delighted and relieved that someone had reassured them that enthusiasm was a dangerous thing and that they did not need to sully their social intercourse or hazard friendship by the occasional mention of the name of Jesus.

Such advice conforms perfectly to the instructions given by secular social groups to visiting speakers. 'Do not mention religion, politics or sex'.

(What dull lives these people must lead.)

But we are not a social club. We are the Church and our primary task is to introduce people to Jesus. Our existence is as the Ark of Salvation. Our task is to lead the thanksgiving to God and the praise of His Name. The Holy Scriptures are the Revelation of His plan for us. The Sacraments are God's give to us of His promised and guaranteed Presence. The Mission is our response to that amazing love and our consequent desire to share it with others and lead all souls to Heaven.

If we can't get enthusiastic about that then there is something seriously wrong with us.

All these thoughts were doing laps in my head last week when I was back in Rome. Two places in particular.

At St. Peter's the piazza was deluged by rain and the Basilica steps resembled Niagara Falls, decanting the water straight into one's pilgrim shoes. Inside were the usual thousands trying to capture the unseen mystery on a myriad of hand held devices. Here was three generations that had not forgotten how to pray. They had never known. They wandered, in Christ's words, harassed and confused 'like sheep without a shepherd'. Their guides were secular automatons, versed in the geography of monuments, utterly unfamiliar with the universal and timeless family that was represented and reconvened here. Nobody told them about Jesus. They really didn't know why they were here – geographically or existentially.

Later that week I stood in the excavated ruins under the Via Lata, where it crosses the Corso and becomes Apostles' Street. Here is the dwelling where St. Paul was under house arrest and probably wrote this morning's letter to Timothy, possibly his last message before martyrdom.

*'Fan the flame'*, he tells Timothy, his beloved protégé. God has given us this gift. We must never be afraid. Never be ashamed of the Gospel. God has given you love and power and discipline. Trust Him. Guard the precious truth with which you have been entrusted.

In the underground rooms there is the remains of the pillar to which the saint was chained. On the walls the ancient murals of early church life are

interspersed with the letters of this Teacher of the World. Against the far wall the restored remnant of the altar where time and eternity meet in the Sacred Mystery of the Mass and the great family of the Faith co-inhere.

What, I asked myself, are Catholics so afraid of today?

Like the apostles in this morning's Gospel, we often say, 'Lord increase our faith. Tell me a bit more before I go out and tell people.'

But Jesus says, *'If your faith was the size of a mustard seed.....'*

You just do what He asks you. He will do the rest.

Stop finding excuses and get on with it.

If we don't tell the world nobody else is going to.

Smile, by all means, but don't forget to tell people what you've got to smile about..... and that means Jesus.

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