



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation

Readings: 2 Kings 5: 14-17; Ps 97, 2 Timothy 2: 8-13, Luke 17: 11-19

It is in Shakespeare's greatest play that the rambling and dispossessed monarch berates his wicked daughters with the line, *'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.'*

As the self-ruined King Lear descends into madness and his demented patriarchy is usurped by a vicious and unfruitful matriarchy only the faithful and the fools continue to love him. Enough culture. It is ingratitude that unseats him and destroys him.

In this morning's Gospel we are confronted by the story of Jesus and the ten lepers. Outcasts and wretched their lot is, of all men the most miserable. By healing them Jesus not only restores them physically but He enables them to take back their place in family, community and society. There can be few greater gifts. So it always astonished me, as a child at Baptist Sunday School, to read that only one man returned to thank Him. In later years I have become much more realistic and now recognise that ten per cent is a pretty good strike rate in these matters.

Jesus commends the thankful leper because it is a sign of the healed man's faith and a good indicator of his spiritual health. Ungrateful people are not a pretty sight.

A story: Between us Sara and I have a large number of Godchildren. They are always prayed for, their birthdays remembered, Christmas, Baptism anniversaries etc. One child in particular never wrote to say thanks or even to acknowledge for a dozen years. Finally Sara sent him a card with multiple choice on it to aid his reply.

I am alive/dead/missing in action.

I have/ have not received my cards/gifts.

I am grateful/ungrateful/indifferent.

She even provided a stamped addressed envelope.

That young man is now in his thirties with his own family and one of our most regular correspondents.

Gratitude is at the heart of the Christian religion. The central prayer is the Eucharist which means 'thanksgiving'. In the Mass we approach the Lord through praise and penitence. We wait on Him by listening to His Word and praying that we may incarnate that Word in our own lives. We bring the world before the altar of sacrifice in prayer and our worship reaches its summation in the Eucharistic Prayer.

'The Lord be with you.', 'Lift up your hearts', 'Let us give THANKS to the Lord our God'.

So we ascend the hill of Zion, the mount of Calvary and gaze on the amazing love of God for us. Leprous with sin, we are healed. Fearful of death we are granted immortality.

Everything else in our life is seen now in the light of this tremendous grace. In being thankful people something fundamental is released in us.

Because we know that we are forgiven we are able to be forgiving.

Because we know that we are truly loved we can be truly loving.

Because we are grateful children of the Most High we can nurture that healing thankfulness in others.

Because we rejoice at the supreme gift of God's love in Jesus we automatically want to share Him with others. That is the natural product of a thankful heart. That is why we return again and again to the central mystery of the Mass where we are ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven and go on our ways with thankful hearts spilling out into the world.

Last thing.....if you want to see a simple secular ikon of thankfulness may I commend you to a two minute clip on Youtube. (If you are not a football fan it's time to get out your Rosary for a couple of minutes.) Ian Wright is a famous Arsenal and England footballer, now retired into TV commentary. Everybody loves Wrighty because he is what most men long to be – middle aged but still ten years old, full of energy and laughter, untrammelled by the adolescence or adulthood.

Wright is pictured in the empty Arsenal stadium waiting to be filmed.

Cut to the picture of an old codger in a flat hat approaching the stadium.

'Ian probably won't recognise me. Probably thinks I'm dead.'

The old man wanders down the empty grandstand towards Wrighty. Wrighty turns. His mouth drops open. He takes his hat off and buries his face in it as he is overwhelmed by tears. *'Mr. Pigden. They told me you was dead.'*

Mr. Pigden is Ian Wright's old teacher. He is the man who regularly rescued Wright from outside classrooms, where he had been banished, and took him off to the library to begin learning. He is also the man who taught Wrighty how to play football. Wright turns to Mr. Pigden, who is one row up, and embraces him, burying his face in Mr. Pigden tummy. As Wrighty later reflected it put him about the same height as he was when Mr. Pigden first took him on.

'Mr. Pigden', said Wright later, *'was the first male role model in my life, the first man who ever cared about me and it made all the difference'*. Wright's life story is dedicated to Sid Pigden.

If you want a picture of a thankful heart and how we might approach the One who has always cared for us, I commend this little clip to you.

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, Holy Father, Almighty God.

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