



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Readings: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13, Ps 146, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, Matthew 5: 1-12

Everybody says that Pope Francis is a very humble guy. I don't know him personally so it's hard to judge. (We've waved at one another across a crowded square in Rome a couple of times but that doesn't really count). One thing I do know is that, if he is as humble as they say, he will be fed up with the world and his wife bleating on about how humble he is. A truly humble person would be mortified by such unwelcome attention.

As my own humble contribution I'm thinking about getting a T shirt printed with the slogan that simply says 'HUMILITY DOESN'T ADVERTISE' (in bold type of course). I know this because I've always had a problem with humility and, as you will appreciate, I've got plenty to be humble about. And today's readings go straight for the jugular of personal vanity.

A little history....When I was first a curate, on really daft days, I really thought that God was lucky to have me. Some days I even amazed myself. How the Lord had managed without me all this time was a bit of a mystery.

Then, a few years down the triumphal road I was given a task I didn't want in a place I didn't want to be. I remember gloomily sitting in the chair in an otherwise empty room at my new posting and saying grumpily to God, 'Well, if you want this thing to happen it's all down to you. I'll just turn up.'

You will be astonished – as I was at the time – brothers and sisters, to find that the Lord God Almighty did a fantastic job, much better than me and in spite of my clear incompetence. It was a lesson I learnt and have to relearn every day of my ministry. GOD ALONE IS GOD.

It's a message that the prophet Zephaniah tries to get across to a disobedient Israel towards the end of the Judaeen monarchy. The people of the kingdom have forgotten what God has done for them. They think it is all their own doing. They have achieved all this under their own steam. They don't need God or, more dishonest still, they can pick and choose when they need Him and which parts of His commands to obey.

This morning's reading reminds us of the need to regain the true perspective of our humanity and its position under God. Similarly with St. Paul. He is trying to sort out the rich, rowdy, factious church in Corinth. So Paul speaks to them very directly – his usual technique, no time for flannel. 'Stupid, weak, common, contemptible' are just some of the epithets. 'Who do you think you are? When you were called you were not called because you were wise wealthy or famous. Actually God chose you to make a point. If He can do something with the likes of you then He is an amazing God. The glory will go to Him because everyone will recognise that you could not have done this by your own merits. On your own you are nothing. 'GET REAL.'

And that is the central function of humility. It is not to create a grovelling, subservient, pretend piety, fraudulent and resentful, but rather to put us in touch with reality. And that ultimate reality is God. In being humble we come to know who He is and who we truly are. It is no accident that Jesus allots the first of the blessings of the Sermon on the Mount to 'the poor in spirit'. The first Beatitude is theirs because, as Our Lord explains, 'of them is the Kingdom of Heaven'.

'Poor in spirit' is to be humble. Humility is the realization that all our gifts and blessings come from God. Not relying on ourselves we are constantly open to God's will. Not our spirit but the Holy Spirit of God. That is what the saints realise and it is why they are saints.

Humility is the opposite of pride, that cardinal sin and fountainhead of disorder and disaster, that saw Lucifer fall from Heaven because he deluded himself that he knew better than his maker.

The prophets are full of exhortation to be humble. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Walk humbly with your God. The humble of the earth seek the Lord and obey His commands. St. Paul says the same. Jesus commends that humility as a state of heavenly blessedness. They do this because they invite, encourage, exhort us to get in touch with reality, The Reality, who has formed us and sustained us and redeemed us and leads us home. Humility enables us to acknowledge our frailty, gives us wisdom to repent and allows the grace of God to do great things in and through our lives.

The ultimate humility is in God's own example to us in Jesus. Taking on our humanity, He humbled Himself even to death on a Cross.

That was God's way and, as we follow the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, it must be ours too.

Perhaps, on reflection, I'll get another T-shirt printed with the legend:
'GET REAL.....GET GODLY.....GET GOING.'

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