



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

If you wish, you can keep the commandments

Readings: Ecclesiasticus 15: 15-20, Ps 118, 1 Corinthians 2: 6-10, Matthew 5: 17-37

I don't know about you but when my copy of Good Housekeeping arrives, once I have discarded the flyers for 'walk-in baths for the elderly' and ladies clothes where I can purchase a 'must-have' woollie for as little as £96 (and they say there's a recession out there), there's one page I immediately turn to. Good old Shelley von Strunckel, the Californian stargazer, tells me exactly what's coming my way (and yours) in the next month.

Shelley's good because she doesn't go into specifics. You've had a bad February. Relax. Most of us have. Your Mercury's been in 'retrograde' March looks better with half of mankind having a fabulous month and most of the rest doing pretty good. Personally, I note, our Shell thinks that 'my dreams are about to come true'. I hope that doesn't arouse any unpleasant envy among the rest of you. Shell's lack of specifics are more comfortable. Younger women's magazines seem to promise that a new love affair is going to turn up every month. At my time of life this would be frankly exhausting, not to mention professionally suicidal.

Of course it's all total baloney – I remember when Good Housekeeping's star sign column was written by the gardening correspondent for a bit of extra pin money and was no less accurate. The idea that a twelfth of

mankind are doomed to the same fate on the basis of their birthday is pure tosh. But people love it. The attraction is its unreality but also its lack of accountability. It's in the stars.

Shakespeare's attitude to this miasma of piffle is summed up in Edmund the Bastard's speech in King Lear. Edmund has just listened to his father, the Earl of Gloucester blaming the recent bad behaviour at court on the position of the sun, moon and stars. Edmund says, 'This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,--often the surfeit of our own behavior,--we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and traitors, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star!'

(How many homilies do you get this much culture?)

Nowadays there even more things to blame, not just the stars. 'Everything that's wrong with me is my parents' fault...' Yet we have all seen good parents turn out unlovely children and crummy parents have children who defy their upbringing gloriously and determinedly.

Then there are our GENES. You may recall a recent Scottish Anglican bishop (who has since embraced a cultured atheism and TV celebrity) claiming that we couldn't be blamed for adultery as some of us have 'adulterous genes'. This is a scientific extension of the 'it's my parents' fault' defence. My advice to the bishop (and anyone else who may have adulterous genes) is to buy a pair of trousers (jeans) with a more secure zip.

Holy Scripture buys none of this monumental tarradiddle. Listen to our first reading again, ‘If you wish, you can keep the commandments. To behave faithfully is within your power. Man has the way of life and the way of death before him. Whichever he chooses will be given to him.’

We are grown ups. We are responsible adults. We cannot hide behind the excuse that it’s something or somebody else’s fault. That’s why we have to be ruthlessly honest in the confessional if we are to mature in faith. We have to train our will in the way of integrity, to get to the root of our failings and let God deal with them.

Jesus tells us that murder grows from the anger of a man’s heart. War grows from holding other human beings in contempt. Adultery and betrayal grows from entertaining lust in our hearts and compromising our integrity. And that’s the key, INTEGRITY. What we say, what we do, who we are need to match up.

Jesus asks us to be grown ups, to be honest with God and ourselves.

He challenges us not to use words to hide the truth. Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No’. We have the liberty to choose. That is the nature of God’s love for us in creation. When we fail we need to head humbly and regularly for the honesty box, the confessional, and let God’s Holy Spirit do some serious work on us. He longs to set us free.

As followers of Christ we are seeking always to conform our will to the will of God, that’s what we say every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. We are not some wonky stardust that misbehaves in time to cosmic rays. We are not a concoction of chemicals that is doomed by our DNA. We are the baptised in Christ, the bearers of the Holy Spirit. We are the sons and daughters of the living God and our destiny is eternal.

So let's get serious. Lent is a couple of weeks away. Let's invite Jesus to retake the high places of our soul, purge the darkness and rekindle our love for Him on the altar of our hearts.

And keep your Parish Priest busy in the honesty box.

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