



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

***Solomon – a promising start but disappointing end***

*Readings: 1 Kings 3: 5, 7-12, Ps 118, Romans 8: 28-30, Matthew 13: 44-52*

My grandfather was a Freemason. He was also a copper. It went with the territory. In his constabulary you were a non-person if you weren't 'on the square'. When he retired he lost all interest in it – even as a superannuated 'boys' club'. Masonry, of course, thinks of itself far more seriously than that and indeed some Catholics attribute most of the world's ills to this 'society of secrets.' Catholics have always been forbidden by the Church from becoming members. Rightly so for, although it claims not to be religious it is, in fact, very religious. It is just not Christian.

Masonry traces its origins to the man in our first reading today, King Solomon. It claims both his arcane wisdom and its bizarre rites as abstractions from the Temple he built. This is, of course, largely nonsense. Masonry is an almost entirely 18<sup>th</sup> Century creation, born of an anti-Catholic mindset and relying on a curious post-Enlightenment brew of sterile Deism and good old fashioned Gnosticism (groups claiming secret knowledge) – a very ancient heresy that turns up in a new frock every couple of centuries. At its best Masonry is a men's fellowship group. At its worst it is a cover for corruption and a recrudescence of pagan religion.

Why did they pick on Solomon? A brief reprise....

Solomon, you will recall, was not King David's obvious heir. Amnon had been murdered for raping Absalom's sister. Absalom had perished in civil war against his father. The next eldest was Adonijah. He would be judicially murdered by Solomon.

Solomon's trump card was that he was the surviving son of King David's great passion, Bathsheba – the guilty secret at the heart of the empire – the woman for whom he had murdered his friends.

In the last days of David's reign, old, infirm, dying, the factions raged around his deathbed. David, the Bible tells us, was wrapped around by a stunningly beautiful Shunnamite woman called Abishag – 'to keep him warm'. She was a sort of royal hot water bottle. (She must have been some piece because when an unsuccessful candidate for the throne asks for her as a consolation prize Solomon has him executed for impertinence.)

As David lay dying the army commanders proclaimed Adonijah as king. Bathsheba rushed to the royal bedside and reminded David of his apparent promise. Her son, Solomon, would be king. (She was some operator that woman. If someone tries to convince me that she was bathing naked on the rooftop under the king's window all those years ago, I don't buy it. A waggon load of monkeys couldn't begin to compete.) David agrees. The die is cast. The high priest anoints Solomon. The rightful king is usurped and later killed along with his loyal followers, among whom were David's most faithful servants.

So Solomon reigned. It was a reign of peace and enormous prosperity. The little kingdom flourished on the trade routes and became a hive of multi-cultural exchange. Solomon is as clever as his mother is cunning and he starts well. In today's passage, the historian describes Solomon's request to God for the divine wisdom to govern God's people. He became the author of works of wisdom and his court a centre of intellectual exchange. The building projects of this forty year reign in tenth century Israel are prodigious and include the famous Temple.

Solomon started well. Unfortunately it didn't last. He started marrying foreign women – lots of them. You could argue that this was necessary to effect treaties etc. but the sheer volume of imported 'totty' – a thousand wives and mistresses – gives the lie to that apologia. The problem was not simply that this was contrary to the Law but these women, being pagans, naturally wanted appropriate chapels for their own devotions. Solomon was a man undone by his trousers. What began as a domestic experiment in multi-culturalism ended in a riot of multi-faith indulgence. (This syncretism can be found in Royal Arch Masonry where the divine name is conflated with that of Canaanite fertility god and an Egyptian deity.) The Lord God was not unique but simply one among many.

The pagan gods now worshipped in Israel included those that required ecstatic cult prostitution, male and female and sanctioned the abomination of child sacrifice, the ultimate post-natal abortion. The idiotic chorus of 'one religion is as good as another' is not new. Beliefs have mortal consequence. Sexual depravity and the abolition of the sanctity of life are the natural bedfellows of paganism.

Much of Solomon's apostasy came in his old age. (As Judge Judy memorably remarked in one of her cases where an elderly man was suing his young former mistress for return of property 'Twenty five meets seventy usually gets a mink coat'.) Not only did his heart and devotion wander to the near fatal corruption of the society which he governed but the wealth corroded his dependence on God.

So great were the demands of his building programmes that he frequently resorted to forced labour and the first request from the people to his successor, Rehoboam, was to take this burden off the people and act justly. Unfortunately Rehoboam had grown up in a rich multi-cultural, multi-faith and corrupt court as a spoilt brat. He ignored the advice of the counsellors and gave notice of his tyrannical intentions. If Solomon had treated them badly, he would be much worse. The Book of Ecclesiasticus dubs him as 'an absolute fool and without understanding'. But he was undoubtedly the product of his father's court and his folly led to a rebellion and the division of the kingdom from which Israel never recovered.

Solomon's legacy was all a very long way from his promising start.

Apostasy from the Faith. Complacency born of prolonged material comfort. An out of touch governing class. Enthusiasm for sexual depravity. The multi-faith, multi-cultural equation. The wholesale sacrifice of children.

It is in such a time as this that God raised the prophets. Should such things ever happen here, that task may be down to you and me.