



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Which of the two did his father's will?

Readings: Ezekiel 18: 25-28, Ps 25, Philippians 2: 1-11, Matthew 21: 28-32

Imagine, if you will, the priest concludes the Gospel and, inspired by the Word of God, you are on the edge of your pew awaiting the profound exposition that will be offered in the subsequent homily and the helpful guidance as to the practical application of the revelation in your daily life of discipleship.

Father, as is his wont, heaps upon you the pearls of wisdom and gives you your marching orders for the week. The homily is wise, witty, pertinent and profound, uplifting and gracious. You would expect no less.

At the door, at the end of Mass, he is affirmed and thanked. Everyone nods, smiles and goes on their way knowing full well that, fifty yards down the road they won't recall a word of the Gospel never mind the homily. Lunch is to be got and other important matters are in train.

Father knows all this but he is happy to bathe briefly in his people's warm glow of affection and approval. Nothing more is required. The people are grateful for a priest who conspires at their evangelistic inertia. Everyone is happy. The boxes have been ticked for another week. Right?

We recognise instantly that this is nonsense. We have already picked this up from the Gospel. The smoothly compliant son who makes all the right noises to his father but, whether intentionally or not, does not carry out his duty or his promise. The human father of the story will be cross and disappointed. He has commissioned his beloved son with important work which has now not been done. The father has trusted and been deceived. He has appointed and been disappointed in his offspring. We recognise the problem and we recoil from the mirror of recognition. The older I get the more the image of this son dogs me. My confession, unlike in my youth, is no longer packed with scarlet sins of commission. My burden is, all too often, what I have failed to do for God. My sins of omission weigh heavy, the duties half done, the opportunities let slip, the finding of other uses for the declining days and energy that accompany age. I have said a big and unconditional 'YES' to my Heavenly Father. To His disappointment and my shame I have too often found alternative distractions to work in the vineyard. You will recognise the problem.

Scenario two:

My grandson is just coming up for two. He has always been a cheery and compliant little chap. When he was with us this summer he had just discovered a powerful new word. The word is 'NO' and he was much entertained by its amazing power. Of course he had often had it said *to* him but the discovery that he could use it himself with such extraordinary effect was just too delightful. It was a showstopper. Literally.

Actually his use of the negative was, as you might expect from a wordy family, a little more sophisticated than a simple 'NO'. He would preface each response to a request with the phrase, 'I Don't want to' ('I Donwanna')

thereby implying not just a simple rejection but both an act of desire and of the will.

The use of the phrase would always be followed by a pause, an assessment of the disproportionate effect of this phrase and a cheeky grin.

Sebastian was discovering 'autonomy'.

My response was to see how this would work out in an ad absurdum situation. So I would say 'Do you wanna.....the thing he had been asked to do'. Seb would reply accordingly in the negative with his charming formula and cheeky grin. I then upped the ante. 'Do you wanna bar of chocolate/ice cream/whatever.' Pause for considerable thought.....power or prizes? 'I donwanna chocolate'. Autonomy is more delicious. Cheeky smile.

More ridiculous offers, more pauses, more autonomy, more grins.

We finish with, 'Would you like to fly to Paris in a helicopter?'

He has understood the game. As he plays his final card, 'I donwanna helicopter' both of us are laughing and we can now get on with the original task, formerly declined.

Turning down the will of the father (or grandfather in this case) demonstrates free will but it also means you lose out on the good things. Seb has got the point. It is, of course, a point that most of us spend our lives learning and re-learning and usually with far less laughter than this little interlude.

We often see people turn away from the will of the Father and reject it. It is fashionable in our culture to reject Him wholesale. Disobedience is a hallmark of our age. We have cultivated the excited newly found autonomy of a two year old into the disabling adolescent sulk that characterises much of our society and its dominant media commentariat. Why do something when you can just moan and be better paid than the doers?

It would, of course, be ideal if our deeds always matched our words. That is the meaning of integrity. But, if it comes to a choice, doing the Father's will is a surer sign of our wholehearted assent than unfulfilled words.

'I donwanna' do a lot of things that Jesus asks me to do – but I know that, however weary, going into the vineyard, conforming my will to that of the Father is where the Kingdom is to be found, the promises fulfilled, deep joy wells up and the real life begins.

©2017 Fowey Retreat