



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

### **30th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A**

#### ***Loving God first***

*Readings: Exodus 22:20-26, Ps 17, Thessalonians 1:5-10, Matthew 22:34-40*

*"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"*

*Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."*

When Jesus says these are the two great commandments and the whole of the Law and the prophetic proclamation of the Word of God depend upon them, then it's quite important that we understand what they say.

When I started at theological training in 1976 there was great emphasis on the second of these great commandments – loving your neighbour as yourself. First of all it caught the zeitgeist of the priority of social action over increasingly intellectually embarrassing religious belief. We didn't need to talk about Jesus or salvation because we were exemplifying the Gospel in our cultural quest for socialist egalitarianism. Furthermore the new theology had discovered a revolutionary psychological truth to Jesus rather tired old injunction.

In order to love your neighbour as yourself.....first of all.....

## YOU HAVE TO LOVE YOURSELF!

This has tied in evermore tightly with the consumerist philosophy of our age. Forty years on we are encouraged, in this mad and vain quest for self-love, to spend extraordinary amounts of time and money on ourselves because, in the words of the advertising slogan, 'You're worth it.'

In the name of self-love ladies are encouraged to pin their faces behind their ears and fill any remaining creases with biological Polyfilla. Men are exhorted to identify their flagging virility with insane donations to online turf accountants.

Young people increasingly suffer from self-esteem issues because of what 'friends' say on social media or half-witted celebrities advertise as lifestyle choices. A recent survey revealed that seeing other friends enjoying themselves on Facebook et al only led, not to joy at others' wellbeing, but to resentment and depression in the viewer.

At the end of a forty year experiment in self-love we do not seem to like ourselves very much. Narcissus was so taken with his own beauty in the reflection of the pond that he drowned in his self-absorption. We are now so taken with our inadequacy and poor self-image that, too often, we do not feel loved at all or even loveable. We are looking at the ravaged image of Fallen Man and drowning in the pond of doubt. There is an existential crisis in the heart of modern Man. For all our frenetic activity, tedious self-centredness, 'me time' etc. we are facing the inevitable question of human life.

Does anybody love me?

Am I worth it?

Why am I here?

We will not find the answers in the Twittersphere or on exotic holidays (the drug of the rich retired) or at the bottom of a pot of cosmetic lotion.

We need to return behind the current social malaise and rediscover what we, as a people, have too long forgotten.

There is a reason Jesus gives the answer in the order that He does. Putting the love of God first is not an accidental or incidental priority. Only when we are connected to our origin and our end can we begin to comprehend who and what we are. In prioritising God we collide with truth. In affording Him our love and worship we begin to see things in ultimate perspective. In Communion with Him we begin to understand exactly what our own worth is.

We experience a love and affirmation that is not soiled by our failure, not diminished by years, not denied by history or circumstance. It is the one constant irreducible love of our lives. Once we have understood that then we have the confidence to love others. Indeed more than that because our love is no longer selfish. It is not *sui generis* or Darwinistic which, in its circularity, prioritises ME. It is a glorious derivative of an unconquerable love that puts the wellbeing of the other first. Without a love of God the human project of love is doomed to introspection, discontent and failure. We will not find our worth in the transient affirmation (or contempt or indifference) of our fellow man.

We will discover it only by looking on the crucified.

How greatly are you loved? – Only that God should give His only begotten Son to die for you.

What are you truly worth? - Only that, through Jesus, you are invited into the Presence for eternity.

Why are you here? – Only that you should learn the love of the Father in Jesus Christ and love others enough to share that Gospel with them.

That is why we come to the supreme mystery of God's love in the Mass.

We gaze with wonder on the Calvary, upon the Sacrifice in whose blood is the forgiveness of our sins, the reconciliation with our loving Father and the transformation of us mortal creatures into His eternal sons and daughters. When we start with the love of self we embark on the road to the city of despair.

When we begin with the love of God and our learning to love Him we set out on the pilgrim way of the intended destiny of Man.

Love is never a quid pro quo. It is always wanting the best for the other. That is what we learn from the Cross of Jesus. It is what we proclaim to the world.