



THE PSALMS by Father Robbie Low

4. PSALM 32

One of the great gifts to the Church of God is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is no accident that Jesus specifically confers on His Apostles the power to remit OR retain sin. One of the greatest failures of the post-conciliar Church is the collapse in the number of the faithful availing themselves of this divine providence. Where the sense of sin is gravely weakened by the dreary philosophical nonsense of relativism (your truth and my truth) so Man is alienated from the love of God, unconscious of his need for mercy and consequently ungrateful for the sacrifice of Christ.

The flight from the confessional is more than a rejection of unfashionable guilt, a post-Freudian spasm, but has the gravest consequences for the whole moral order with its materialistic denial of responsibility and assertion of a personal, self-destructive and tyrannical autonomy. Holiness and goodness emerge from encountering the truth – the truth of who we are and who God is. Evasion of these realities leads down the short road to Hell.

I once had the misfortune to minister in a church where I was informed that no-one had spoken to them about sin for years and they weren't about to put up with it now. Two people told me they would withhold their offering

if I mentioned sin again. In fact many more did exactly that. It was a sort of 'reverse simony'. Instead of trying to buy the Holy Spirit, you paid to keep Him away.

I have never understood this bizarre reaction. It has always seemed to me that Jesus died for my sins and that to deny this was to exhibit a monstrous ingratitude and to imply that He was wasting His time on Calvary.

Such an attitude explains why 'sin-shy', 'reconciliation avoiding' congregations are recognised by their puerile nursery rhyme worship and content free homilies. It also accounts for why non-believers, unchallenged by the real Gospel should see no need of salvation. 'Salvation from what?', they might reasonably ask.

The psalmist has no truck with such slippery tripe.

'Blessed is the man whose unrighteousness is forgiven, whose sin is covered.'

It is the fervent desire and ambition of us all to be blessed. The path to this blessedness is the recognition of our unrighteousness. St. Gregory Nazianzen observed that, 'What is not offered cannot be healed'. The greater the saint, the deeper his awareness of his sinfulness. The nearer we are to the Light of Lights, the more clearly we can see the shadows of our sins of commission and omission. The closer we move to the All Holy, the greater our awareness of our unholiness. Blessing comes through the honesty of our confession and the promised healing of reconciliation. Our unrighteousness is forgiven by Christ's gift to the Apostles and our sin is covered by His Blood shed on the Cross.

The link between the confessional and the altar could not be clearer and it is to the crippling detriment of the Church's ministry and mission that this bond has been so carelessly and consistently loosened.

Let us listen to the psalmist as he describes the pain of impenitence:

'While I held my tongue my bones consumed away through my daily complaining.'

Unconfessed sin is a terrible burden. It's the spiritual life equivalent of trying to run the mile with a sack of coal on your back. Only an idiot would do that. But how idiotic we all too often are, preferring the pain of self-inflicted punishment to the joyful purifying penance of God. The psalmist reminds us that unconfessed, unrepented sin eats away at us. It makes us the opposite of Christians. Christians are a people whose central prayer is Eucharist/Thanksgiving at the heart of the Mass. Sin makes us miserable. Miserable people complain. They are moaners, an ungrateful lot. Satan was a moaner and look where it got him.

The psalmist is well aware of God's hand upon him and describes himself as *'like a drought in the summer'*. Not only then is he sad, ungrateful and a moaner but he is dried up, unirrigated, incapable of producing the fruitful crop that the Divine Sower might reasonably expect. As the impenitent has cut himself off from the flow of grace and mercy so he is unable to pass it on. He is a desert not a vine.

You would expect the psalmist to analyse his predicament (and ours) and act. He does just that. In that modern Americanism, 'He 'fesses up'. He doesn't hide his unrighteousness. He acknowledges reality and comes heart

to heart with God and encounters the great liberation of divine mercy. A prayer I often use when people come to me for confession and ask blessing says simply, *'The Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may worthily confess your sins, lay them at the foot of the Cross of Jesus and receive the liberating mercy of His Blood shed for you. Amen.'*

A properly prepared and good confession should see us absolved and walking away almost on air, filled with love and thankfulness and renewed strength for the journey.

We must do this while the Lord may be found. We need to be regular, not suddenly caught out by the water floods of death or so doped on morphine that responding to the last rites is beyond us. Confession, the psalmist tells us, is what the godly, the lovers of God, do. In response God not only forgives us but surrounds with his divine protection and songs of deliverance, the triumph of victory over sin and death. Furthermore our subsequent relationship with God remains intense and personal. We are not guided by bit and bridle like animals who do not know where they are going but by God's eye. We are sharers in the divine vision.

The psalmist concludes:

'The man who puts his trust in the Lord, mercy embraces him on every side, Be glad, you righteous, rejoice in the Lord. Be joyful you that are true of heart.'

Far from being a fearful thing, a shameful imposition, we are reminded that it is a most wonderful sacramental gift, a welcome into the Presence, an encounter with the Holy Spirit and a joyful acceptance of the gift of the

saving sacrifice of Jesus and the crucial step on the road to the altar of thanksgiving and the inspiration to share that mercy with the world.

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