



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday of Advent Year B

Receive the gift that keeps on giving

Readings: Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11; Ps 84, 2 Peter 3: 8-14, Mark 1: 1-8

I think it was Spike Milligan, in his riotous Irish novella, Puckoon, who described life as 'a long lingering illness only curable by death'.

That is not quite the Biblical view but the Scriptures see human life as afflicted by a lifelong and mortal illness – sin. It is part of our condition since the Fall. It goes by the name of Original Sin though, tragically, there is usually nothing original about it. We all have, what the great Easter hymn, the Exultet, calls 'the happy fault, the necessary sin of Adam which won for us so great a redeemer'. But the peculiarities of our own tedious variations and repetitions on this flawed theme are neither happy nor remotely entertaining.

It has been too much the fashion in my lifetime to downplay 'sin'. Victorian sensibilities had drowned in it, Catholics were tired of the 'guilt trip', modern psychology hummed the popular tune, 'Accentuate the positive' – eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative etc. (Don't mess with Mister In Between).

All had their point but the cumulative wisdom of these reactions did not remove the reality. Sin, contrary to fashionable illusion, was not abolished in

1962. Indeed failure to acknowledge it, fear of addressing it, denial of its reality have led, not to its disappearance but to its assertion of mastery and the cultural corrosion that now afflicts our civilisation.

Christianity is a religion of absolute reality. It has no time for comfortable evasion or cloying circumlocution. The Gospel begins with a call to repentance. The very first thing we need to do, if we are to prepare for the Lord's coming, in history, at the end of time, at this Mass, at our dying, is to get straight, get real, get cleaned up, get holy. Anything less is playing at it. We suffer from the mortal illness of sin. We want to be healed. If we had a physical malady, we would go to the doctor, take the tablets, book the operation, endure the chemotherapy, whatever. We might be nervous but we would, sure as Heaven, get on with it. Why are we so reluctant with our immortal souls?

As adults we are afraid to say when we get things wrong. We find sorry a difficult word to say. We are mortified by the thought of looking foolish in the eyes of others etc. etc. But the truth is that God knows all this. We cannot hide our stupidities, infidelities and failures from Him. We can surround ourselves with a fortification of unconfessed sin, hardening by the day. We can refuse to lower the drawbridge of our hearts and let the King of Glory in. We can wrap ourselves in thick blanket of increasingly whiffy impenitence and reject the loving embrace of Jesus. But why would we take that option?

Christ Himself has given us the solution in the sacramental life of the Church. If we truly want to respond to the Gospel call then we can avail ourselves of the great and liberating and joyful Sacrament of Reconciliation.

If you have not been for some time, let me reassure you.

When I hear your confession, I always end with these words, 'Go in peace and pray for me, a sinner' – because that is the reality that binds us together. When I make my own confession and kneel beside my Confessor priest, no-one could feel more stupid for their failures, more embarrassed by their dreary follies. But no-one could be more desperate for the healing of absolution, the wisdom of ghostly counsel or the joy of thankful penance. There, on my knees, I can be truly myself before God, no secrets hidden, no illusions indulged, no evasions possible or desirable. There on my knees it is heart to heart with Jesus. There on my knees I am aware, both as penitent and confessor, of the power and Presence of the Holy Spirit of God. There on my knees I know the futile burden lifted, the tear stained face gently wiped and the sin stained soul washed by the water from the wounded side of my Saviour. I am in the Presence of the Divine Mercy. I know how much I am loved. I know how deep a healing He seeks to perform. I know that He is setting me free and I can arise with a joyful heart.

This is what Jesus wants for all of you and what any priest who loves you would want for his people.

One final word of comfort. People often worry what the priest will think of them after a full and well prepared and thorough confession. Let me tell you. Your sins and mine are laid at the foot of the Cross. The priest does not and would not wish to remember them. He is given the gift of divine forgetfulness. What he does remember, when he sees you coming, is that you are someone, like him, who is serious about the spiritual journey, this pilgrimage of grace and he is touched by a sense of both companionship and solidarity. We are in this together and Christ has given us this inestimable gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, paid for by His Precious Blood.

Come and receive the gift that keeps on giving.

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