



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-August 5th 2018 Bodmin

The Spirit of Complaint

Readings: Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15, Psalm 77, Ephesians 4:17, 20-24, John 6:24-35

A few Sundays ago, after Mass at another church, an elderly congregant greeted me with the words, 'I have a complaint!' Suppressing the desire to be flippant and suggest ointment or antibiotics, I hunkered down to listen to the cause of distress. I never mind in the least when matters arise because it means people have been listening and, as I try to teach only and always what the Church teaches, it indicates one of two things or both.

They have got the wrong end of the stick.

I have not been clear in my exposition.

Either way it needs rectifying. I cannot complain when people do this because I always say, 'If you think a priest is talking nonsense, ask him courteously where you can find what he has been saying in the Catechism or the Holy Scripture or the documents of the Church.' It helps keep us honest and faithful.

I was expecting some response as my homily, that morning, had been a particularly vigorous defence of a socially unpopular Catholic teaching. As it happened the complainant said nothing about the homily but

launched into a broadside about the liturgy supposedly based on the Second Vatican Council.

It always amazes me how many Catholics of that generation claim to represent the Council without ever having read the documents. Anyway it gave me an opportunity to advertise the fact that the Council specifically mandated the maintenance of Latin and the need for congregations to be able to sing the Latin responses. It did not abolish the great historic patrimony of Church music in favour of jingles and choruses and, indeed, commends Gregorian chant to pride of place in the liturgy. It did not abolish Catholic teaching on controversial matters and give an imprimatur to private opinion or the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age.

That is the shifting sand of Protestantism.

We had quite a good chat. All of which was, I hope, quite positive.

It was the final thing that my interlocutor said that really troubled me.

With a triumphant flourish she announced:

'I am a moaner. Always have been. Always will be.'

This required an instant pastoral response.

'Well, stop it.'

Few things are more damaging to the life of the soul than this carefully nurtured negativity. It casts a shadow over the sun and leads to a spirit of ingratitude and infantile self-centredness. (I preach to myself here as much as to you). When the spirit of complaint possesses a soul it drags us away from the very fountainhead of our Faith which is the Thanksgiving at the heart of the Mass, the Eucharistic prayer in Christ. This spirit of complaint has consequences far beyond the personal and militates against both community and society.

In this morning's Old Testament reading we see a classic example. Here are the people of the Hebrews, in the wilderness, complaining about

their plight and their rations. They are nostalgic for Egypt where they had such a wonderful life. They remember eating their fill of bread and meat, fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks and garlic (Numbers 11 v 5// Ex 16). Life was just dandy then.

They have forgotten the oppression, the slavery, the cruelty, the murder of their male children. They have forgotten the miraculous liberation by God. They have forgotten the courageous leadership of Moses. They have forgotten the promise of the land and freedom at the end of this journey. All they can think is that they wish they were back and just like everybody else. They wish they had never taken the risk and set out in faith. Their ingratitude is monumental. They have forgotten to be thankful. Not for the last time Moses is in danger from his own people. They have forgotten their history. They have forgotten the truth.

The same is about to happen to Jesus. Immediately after the Feeding of the 5000, He is followed by thousands who are more interested in Him as a portable 'food bank' than a Saviour. When the full implications of the journey to the Promised Land become clear, most will walk away. It is the story of Catholic lapsation of our time. The spirit of complaint has suffocated the song of thanksgiving in many hearts.

Nor is it confined to the Christian church in our culture. Turn on your radio or TV and you will hear the drip of that poison. We cheerfully listen to everyone from media pundits to comedians treating our elected representatives with vicious contempt. The unelected, overpaid, self congratulatory media circus, funded by us, creates an agenda which is seldom kind or honest. Paid many times more than an MP, the interviewer is an expert at innuendo, sneer and destruction yet has never delivered anything. The much vilified politician is reduced to an object of distrust and public contempt. They are the ones who actually

have to produce the goods. The reality is that the vast majority of them work ridiculously hard for their constituents, whether we personally agree with their policies or not. We are not to be naive but the constant barrage of complaint, personal attack and cultivation of distrust by the media is as much an enemy of our democratic freedoms and common life as anything Mr. Putin might be up to. Moses and Jesus didn't have social media to cope with but most of the rest of the symptoms haven't changed.

The spirit of complaint makes us ungrateful people. We forget to be thankful to God or to one another. We become 'moaners' rather than 'doers'. From the omission of grace at our dinner tables to the failure to encourage one another and uphold those we have entrusted with leadership ingratitude distorts reality and diminishes Man. It is corrosive. It is that serious because it is the very spirit that transformed Lucifer from the Lightbearer into the rebellious Dark Lord.

Christian people are not Panglossian fools ('All is for the best in this best of all possible worlds'). We are the ultimate realists. As followers of Christ we know the journey will be tough. We know also that the summit and source of our Faith is the Mass because it is where we are fed with the Bread from Heaven, the Viaticum, the food for the journey, and where we encounter Christ.

At its heart is the thanksgiving for His love for us and our salvation.

A spirit of complaint shrinks the soul.

A thankful heart is a vehicle for God's glory and the transformation of Man.