



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-September 30th 2018-Padstow

Readings: Numbers 11: 25-29, Psalm 18, James 5: 1-6, Mark 9: 38-43, 45, 47-48

Somewhere in the dim distant recesses of what remains of memory I recall some instructions from sermon classes in the seminary.

They went rather like this:

‘A good sermon should have three key points - certainly no more.’

This, in retrospect, I suspect was to protect the laity from preachers who never knew how to end their sermons and would simply wander from ‘and one more thing’ to another.

Thus you will be thrilled to know that this morning’s sermon has three points.

The second nugget of expository wisdom was also threefold. It went: ‘Tell them what you are going to tell them. Then tell them. Then tell them what you have told them’.

As you and I have coffee and luncheon to get to I propose to ignore this nostrum and echo the beautiful leader of the Resistance in ‘Allo, Allo’ whose refrain was ‘I will tell you this once and once only!’

In the first reading today we encounter Moses at a critical moment in his service of the Lord and of the People of God. Thus far he has been responsible, not only for the liberation of a people and their subsequent

leadership but also for the day to day governance, discernment and judgement of every last detail of community life and dispute. He is, understandably, exhausted. His wise old father-in-law, Jethro, had noticed this and made an extraordinary, spirit inspired suggestion.

DELEGATION.

Moses would still be in charge of the overall governance. He would still be the man who went before God on behalf of the People and speak to the People on behalf of God. His authority would be undiminished but there was a lot of ordinary, common sense, practical decisions that could be delegated to carefully chosen, trained, godly, faithful others. Referral of things that could not otherwise be resolved would still go to the boss. However good the boss is there will be others with different gifts to make up his shortcomings.

(I often say that the one thing I would have brought with me from Anglicanism was my churchwardens and deputy wardens whose hard work, godly living and faithful support made my life as the parish priest manageable on most days, tolerable on bad days and absolutely joyful on good days.)

So Moses takes the seventy chosen outside the camp and the Lord comes down in the cloud. He 'takes some of the spirit on Moses and poured it on these elders'. They are commissioned for God's work in the community and their obedient participation in the work of Moses.

Please note that Moses is not diminished by this outpouring on others any more than the Bishop is weakened by ordaining priests or the priest spiritually emptied by baptising a new believer We are talking about the Spirit of God here. Universal. Infinite.

Just how important this is becomes clear when a report comes in that two blokes who stayed behind in the camp have also been blessed in this way. Is Moses jealous or officiously bureaucratic about this

happening. Rather the opposite. 'I only wish,' he says, 'that the Lord had given His spirit to all the people!'

In this story we see a prefiguring of the commissioning of the seventy disciples by Jesus and a long look ahead to the awesome reality of Pentecost when The Lord begins the work of pouring His Holy Spirit on the Universal Church.

Points one and two therefore:

Delegation by careful spiritual discernment does not diminish godly leadership.

The Holy Spirit of God is not limited. We are not the less for His outpouring on others – rather the stronger. But the Holy Spirit of God is consistent. He never contradicts Himself. (Thus it is easy to discern false spirits.) I always found that, whatever the challenge, praying wardens and a praying pastoral council would come to a godly consensus and move forward together in harmony, discerning the will of God.

Point three:

Jesus encounters much the same problem as

Moses.

Disciples are worried that other people are doing things in His Name.

What are we to make of all that?

It is some time since we were encouraged to think that not all Protestants went to Hell. That does not mean that we accept their theology or, at the worst excesses, tolerate the misrepresentation of the Catholic Faith or flagrant Romaphobia that oozes out of pamphleteers and their successors on the internet. But we do know that there are a lot of good people out there, in the other ecclesial organisations, who really love Jesus. (Sometimes, to our shame, more than we do). We witness them turning up on the right side of the great defining moral issues of

our time. We see them ever keen to bring people to a knowledge and love of the Lord, their missionary zeal often keener than ours.

We cannot dismiss this or them.

There are a lot of people who love Jesus but do not know the Church. So we have a duty to acknowledge their work but pray for their coming to the fulness of the Faith in the sacramental life of the Universal Church. Real unity will make us stronger. It is no accident that successive Popes have placed great emphasis on this work throughout our lifetime.

1) Spiritually discerned delegation for the use of the gifts of God in His People.

2) Understanding the limitless power of God to inspire His People and, not being jealous, but rather longing for this outpouring on all the faithful.

3) Recognising the love of Jesus in others and working tirelessly for the reconciliation and unity of His Church.

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