



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday of Easter -Year C-May 19th 2019

Readings: Acts 14: 21-27, Psalm 144, Apocalypse 21: 1-5, John 13: 31-35

Boasting about penances is not encouraged. Indeed penances today are generally so light that there is nothing to boast about anyway. Gone are the days when the priest might suggest that you be immured for a week on bread and water or go on the next flagellant procession. However there is one I want to share with you. Quite early on in my time as a Catholic the confessor, my then parish priest, gave me the best penance I've ever had. He gave me the Acts of the Apostles to read at a sitting. Those of you who know the priests that I have worked under will get no prizes for guessing who the confessor was.

I mention this, not because it was a heroic effort but because it was truly a great joy and I commend it to you. The Acts of the Apostles is the first volume of the history of the Church. We are writing the current volume now with our own lives and in our own time. So it is a great place to reconnect with the dynamic and missionary power of the work of Christ in an often alien and hostile world. It is an amazing story of how the obscure and unlikely narrative of salvation was validated by God, made sense of by Man and became the Universal Church

We are whisked from the encounters of the Resurrection, the glory of the Ascension to the reformation of the Apostolic Band and the power

of Pentecost. We are privy to the early councils of the Church, walk beside the great foundational characters of our Faith, witness the early martyrdoms. We are invited into the decisions that transforms a Jewish cult into an international Faith, the fulfilment of the promises of the prophets.

We travel to strange cities, see the acceptance and rejection of the Gospel, the appointment of the priests in Apostolic orders, the planting and building up of the local churches and the lessons learned. We are in the very crucible of the events that will mark and mould the 2000 years of Christian civilisation that will determine our culture and our creed, our ethics and our jurisprudence up until the present apostasy.

In today's passage we follow Paul and Barnabas on the homeward leg of their first missionary journey c.44-46 AD. It seems just a list of names until we recall the outward journey when they had first travelled through these hinterland cities Ordained in Antioch they missioned Cyprus, pushed on to Pisidian Antioch, then Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. In town after town they preached, performed miracles, made converts, were attacked, persecuted, expelled. In Lystra Paul was stoned and left for dead. His response, on regaining consciousness, was to limp, heavily battered, back into the centre of the town to bear witness before setting out the following day to Derbe. (I love Paul).

So this list is more than a list. They are returning into dangerous territory. When Paul says, 'We have to experience many hardships for the Kingdom', this is not pious cliché but hard lived experience. As they return they 'put fresh heart into the disciples', 'encourage' them, reiterate the Faith to the newly planted churches, pray with them, fast for them and ordain presbyters/priests for them to lead the flock and celebrate the sacraments. Only then do they set sail for home where

they give account of the mission and rest and recover and prepare for the next journey.

We often think of 'church planting' as a specifically modern evangelical phenomenon. But this is how the Church began – mission, church planting, ordaining ministers of the Gospel to serve those communities. Our own parish of Bodmin, the House of Monks, was a primary base for the evangelisation of Cornwall serving the many mission stations throughout the county. That remains its primary purpose. For long years after the Reformation, in time of persecution, English Catholics tended to see their priority as maintenance – survival. But we must never forget that, while maintenance is important, its importance is that it maintains the base for the Mission of the Universal Church, the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the salvation of Man.

Reread the Acts – it is our history.

Reread the Acts – it is the manifesto of our mission.

It's what happens when Jesus is in charge of His Church