



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Most Holy Trinity-Year C-June 16<sup>th</sup> 2019

*Readings: Proverbs 8: 22-31, Psalm 8, Romans 5: 1-5, John 16: 12-15*

Proverbs 8: v 22 – 31 ‘Wisdom – created by God before the oldest of His works. At God’s side as a master craftsman, delighting in Him – at play in His Presence delighting to be with the sons of men’

Fifty two years ago the greatest athlete of my lifetime, Muhammed Ali, delivered a prolonged and brutal beating to his former friend and contemporary, Ernie Terrell. As each blow landed on the unfortunate opponent, Ali screamed at him, through the mist of blood and sweat, ‘What’s my name?’

Terrell had thought it a good pre-fight wind up to reject Ali’s newly adopted name and faith and refer to him by, what Ali dubbed, his old slave name, Cassius Clay. To Clay, now Ali, this was the ultimate insult because it sought to deny who he truly was. A person’s name is co-terminous with their identity and the essence of our knowledge of them. Ali, in the shadow of the Vietnam war and on the eve of his imprisonment for refusal to participate, used all his extraordinary skill and power to hand out a vicious lesson in the politics of knowledge and power. Years later, as a much older and physically wounded warrior he would add wisdom to his self- knowledge and become a giant of reconciliation and an ikon of noble suffering.

The Bible tells us a lot about knowledge and a lot about wisdom. They are not the same – though one may eventually lead to the other. The Fall of Man is outlined as a disobedient quest for knowledge that will make us into gods. Such power in the hands of the unwise is disastrous and so we are expelled, in Adam, from Eden. Man, millennia on, may enjoy that apotheosis, that true divinisation, but only through the incarnation of Christ and His suffering and death on the Cross. The road to the divine wisdom leads through the Calvary.

The restless search for knowledge is part of the nature of Man. But, untrammelled by wisdom, it is potentially lethal. The current rows between east and west are partly fuelled by the industrial levels of theft organised by China on the intellectual property of the west. The state, still labouring under the tyranny of centralised state Marxist planning and consequent repression, wants the knowledge to compete without the wisdom to liberate its people. That is the hallmark of tyrannies throughout history.

A couple of weeks ago I spent an evening with an old and much valued friend. We are very different men. I am a second rate thinker. He is a first rate practical man. Over the last few years he has endured a lot of suffering, a series of life-threatening medical and surgical events. In the first round of this, fighting bravely and hugely supported by his loving wife, he said he had learnt much about who he really was. He had come to a profound self-knowledge in the light of his suffering and response. I knew this to be true because I had witnessed it. But, he said, that self-knowledge did not substantially change him. It told him what parts of him were still in the dark, the bits he didn't like but, on recovery, he rejoiced and got on with life much the same.

The second bout, more recently, had held up the same mirror to his soul but this time he was ready for the acceptance of the divine wisdom and the needful action on the soul. Self –knowledge was a necessary step but the next part of the journey was the key.

Who am I? – or ‘What’s my name?’, as Ali memorably spat in the ring as a young man and then answered with great dignity in his last years, is the great question.

There are two answers and they are not incompatible, though one must be eventually subsumed into the other. ‘Who am I?’

I am ‘a son of Man’, child of that fallen race, seeker of knowledge and power, disobedient, exiled from Eden, moving from dust to dust, strutting my all too brief moment in the sun then tragic and swiftly forgotten heir of oblivion.

But that is not all the answer. In Christ, in the Word made Flesh, in the outpouring of the divine and transforming wisdom poured out on the disciples, the other side of Calvary, I am also a child of God.

In Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, ascended and glorified, that Son of Man becomes the Child of God and heir of eternity.

When the great Norse myth had the God Odin hanging nine nights on the world tree to gain wisdom, this was but a pagan nod in the direction of the truth of the Gospel. For it is indeed on the Tree of Life, the Cross of Christ, that the divine wisdom is revealed to mortal man and he can come to know who he truly is and what great power of transforming love must purge him and make him truly fit for the kingdom, truly a child of God.

The old slave name, the servitude to sin, is gone.

The name of the freeborn is ours. Jesus Christ.