



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C

### **Mission**

*Readings: Isaiah 66: 10-14, Ps 65, Galatians 6: 14-18, Luke 10: 1-12, 17-20*

The great driving force of the Universal Church of God is Mission.

It is the belief that, in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, through His life, death and resurrection the doom of fallen Man is undone.

That, in Christ, the frail mortal, time-locked race may regain the gates of Eden and be admitted to the Eternal Presence.

It is the belief that Man can be saved.

It is the conviction that the mandatum of the Church is to proclaim this truth and welcome the sinner home into the transcendent body of Christ and his original destiny.

This is, sadly, for the most part, not where we are.

In Western society the dynamic of the Evangelion has been sapped by bad theology and cultural drift. At a theological level there has been a lazy consensus towards practical universalism. That is the belief that – either there is no future, no god, no heaven etc. or that, if there is, then everybody will go there and dwell with the god in whom they don't believe, in a fantasy fairyland of the unending future. When did you last go to a funeral where the deceased's future was even in doubt. Even the secularists wobble on about where the deceased will be mysteriously 'reunited'.

The cultural drift has seen an increasingly militant atheism reject the very concept of the divine and relative economic prosperity becomes the end and aim of our corporate worship.

Within the Western Church there has been an intellectual and disastrous retreat from doctrine. A few weeks ago at the door of this church, a visitor stopped to thank me for my sermon but went on to say that he did not believe in Purgatory. A minute of further investigation revealed he did not believe in Hell either. Challenged by the fact that Jesus, more than anybody, speaks about Hell, it became clear that my modernist visitor didn't believe the Scriptures were a true record of anything – mere mythological creations of the early Church. In short, I pointed out, no need for salvation, no need for the sacrifice of Christ – the crucifixion a sickening and unnecessary charade – the Mass a celebration of a lie and the Church a misleading organisation that should be shut immediately. There is an inexorable logic to the dilution of belief.

Much of the remaining energy of the Church in the West has, in my lifetime, been consequently diverted into two other channels. The first has been the business of maintenance. This is further subdivided. Maintenance of congregational numbers, the attempt to keep the next generation in Church. The other maintenance has been of increasingly emptying buildings. The short sharp lesson of contemporary history is such maintenance becomes impossible without the dynamic conviction of purpose. No mission means no maintenance. Maintenance is important but it depends upon a redemptive *raison d'être*. No Gospel means the children drift, the buildings close. The buildings close, the people ebb away on a burgeoning tide of secular agnosticism.

The other strand is the subtle substitution of good works for Gospel proclamation. Our charitable work becomes a surrogate for our evangelisation. There is nothing wrong with our good works. They are an important part of what we do in the Corporal Works of Mercy. The key thing is that we unashamedly do them as a response to the Gospel of Christ and as a stated intention of Jesus' love – not as a way of salving our conscience while we remain otherwise silent about Him and the purpose of the Cross. Today's Scripture is about Mission. St Paul, the great evangelist and teacher, tells us that all he can boast of is Jesus and His sacrifice. That is the engine of his amazing world changing ministry. Nothing more, nothing less. He confronts his hearers with the spiritual reality. The fall of Man, the fate of those shut off from God. The purpose of God's supreme act of love in condescending to become Man and, in sharing our life and death, offers absolution from the Cross and restoration to our intended destiny with Him in eternity.

Unless a man knows his condition, how can he respond? Those of us who do know are duty bound to share the warning and the promise.

In the Gospel today, Jesus sends out the 72, a parallel to the assistants of Moses in the earlier covenant. He sends them in pairs. This remains good Gospel practice. Those of you who have ever done street mission will recognise the pattern.

Always pray for the house you are visiting. (I always mark the door frame with the sign of the Cross before I ring the bell.) Offer Peace to the house. Most people respond amicably. If not, thank them and leave. If they engage then you have the conversation. I use a little questionnaire on belief to get

the conversation going. You will be amazed how willing people are to talk about themselves often in a very deep way. Offer simple literature and prayer. Be courteous.

Opportunities come up in other ways. Formal set pieces – shared mission in public places. Personal conversations where deep questions arise. Listen for the opportunities. Learn to recognise them. Pray for them. Use them. Enjoy them. Every time you witness to Jesus Christ you will have done your job. Every time you witness to Jesus Christ, your own faith will be strengthened and your confidence will grow.

Mission and maintenance are both important but there is no question which is the priority. The love of God and the desire for the salvation of our fellow man begins at the Cross of Christ and informs everything we do. That is the meaning of the Mass.

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