



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

19th Sunday Year C

Faith and faithfulness

Readings: Wisdom 18: 6-9, Ps 32, Hebrews 11: 1-2, 8-19, Luke 12: 32-48

Today's readings are about Faith and faithfulness.

They are not the same thing though they are, clearly, related.

In the once native heartlands of Christendom, Europe, the Faith, as we have received it, has been subjected to generations of criticism and doubt in the theology faculties themselves. In the academic world, more widely, the philosophical accompaniment to Christian thinking has been regularly and gravely assaulted by the popular but utterly implausible nonsenses of post-modernism and deconstructionism.

In the popular mind the thin veneer of adherence to the stories of the Faith have been stripped away by a combination of educational failure and an indifference born of unsurpassed material comfort and hedonism.

To speak of one's Christian Faith in England today is to be regarded, charitably and at best, as an oddball, someone in need of a comfort blanket, an intellectual crutch, a sedative against the awful realities of the world.

To go further and argue that Faith against the prevailing disintegrating mores of the land is to court arrest and prosecution.

Yet the state of Western Europe and our own land in particular is an anomaly. Most of the rest of the world exhibits faiths and, to a greater or lesser extent, faithfulness. Unbelief is not the default position of Man.

Of course Faith is a gift. It cannot be manufactured. That, in itself, is seen as an excuse for the great departure from revealed truth – but that will not do.

Many years ago a young friend of mine, a well-intentioned agnostic, asked me how to get faith. I replied: ‘How do you get Radio 4? You buy a radio. You plug it in. You turn the dial carefully seeking the signal and tune it in.’

The quest for faith is a quest for eternal truth. You have to seek. You have to put yourself in the way of the signal. You have to traverse the band-width knowing, from your witness friends, that there is such a possibility of receiving. As with any other discipline, you put yourself in the way of that connection and information. You will not learn about chemistry or biology or the conjugation of Latin verbs by sitting on your backside waiting for an App to be fitted to your brain.

Faith is that vital connection with the divine reality in which all things live and move and have their being. It is born of encounter. It is why we come to Mass prepared for that encounter. We do not come to make the priest feel better about himself or to give him marks out of ten for entertainment. We come prepared, ready, engaged, tuned in by prayer. If we do not then, while the encounter is always there in the Real Presence, we will be oblivious to it. That encounter is what fuels our witness in the world because we speak of reality. The Mass does end at the door of the Church – it is the beginning of the mission.

Faith is what, in our experience of God in Christ, through the ministry of His

Body, the Church, we know to be true and live our lives by. It is our part in the common experience of the self-revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures and in the lives of our friends, the Saints.

In the reading from the Book of Wisdom, we are given a small snatch of the beautiful meditation and reflection on the Exodus, that defining moment in the history of the People of God – an event that the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus, would make eternal in the mystery of the Mass.

We know that in the years that would lie ahead the People of God would err, fall away, complain, resent their freedom, rebel against their teachers, sin and flounder. The overall direction of the people did not change though their fragility and faithfulness were mightily tested.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the uncut version, there is a long list of witnesses to the Faith who kept the Faith in the most difficult and dangerous of circumstances. There will be times, in every life, when there are, what I would call 'long silences from God'. These are, in my experience, times when we just have to get on with the job in hand. These are the times of faithfulness. For the liberated Hebrew slaves it meant trusting that encounter to see them through to the Promised Land. For Abraham and Sara it meant trusting a promise so outrageous as to be, humanly speaking, implausible. For all the great men and women who have walked this pilgrim way before us, there have been times of testing and just getting on with the task we were given.

Faithfulness is an act of love and supreme trust in the One who has revealed Himself to us and, in Jesus, called us and called us home.

Faithfulness is an act of will and intention and courage.

Jesus, in today's Gospel, reminds us that there will be long periods when the

Master is about other business. The good servant does his job whether the Master is obviously around or not. That is the work of faithfulness.

For me one of the most poignant and resonating descriptions of faithfulness comes in an unlikely place but sums up our all too human dilemma:

At the end of the House at Pooh Corner, Christopher Robin explains to his beloved Pooh that he is going away for a good while. This is a concept Pooh struggles with as he only knows here and now. I leave you with this parable.

‘Then Pooh began to think of all the things Christopher Robin would want to tell him when he came back from wherever he was going to, and how muddling it would be for a Bear of Very Little Brain to try and get them right in his mind. "So, perhaps," he said sadly to himself, "Christopher Robin won't tell me any more," and he wondered if being a Faithful Knight meant that you just went on being faithful without being told things.’

Sometimes, brothers and sisters, need I tell you, that's exactly what it's like.

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