



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-August 25th 2019

Readings: Isaiah 66: 18-21, Psalm 116, Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13

Luke 13: 22-30

‘The Lord trains those He loves and punishes those He acknowledges as sons’

As a young man, in my second parish, I was given the chaplaincy of the adjacent public school. Volunteering for Thursday afternoon games the Sports staff, quite deliberately, gave me the newest most recalcitrant group of young boys in a school which was famous for its relaxed attitude to discipline. ‘Not so much laid back as horizontal’ was the mantra.

The boys assembled in front of me by the rugger pitch. I asked for quiet. I didn’t get it. I gave them ten press-ups. I asked for quiet. I didn’t get it. Ten more. This tiresome (and tiring) procedure continued for ten minutes until they could scarcely draw breath. Still someone managed to gasp a few words.

I ordered them back to the changing room where they sat, in absolute silence for the remaining hour and a half, on pain of detention, while I caught up with my marking. Utterly tedious for all concerned.

The following week I asked for silence. It was immediate. We began learning the skills. They learned to play hard and well. We had a very happy term and that year group later blossomed into some of my best boys in the sixth form.

Did they enjoy being disciplined? No.

Did I enjoy disciplining them ? No

Was the discipline an essential prerequisite of learning, progress, skill and teamwork? Yes

Did the boys, later young men, come to understand that I was not a spoilsport but wanted the best for them? Eventually....Yes

Did I treat them like sons? No question. I want my boys to be the very best God made them.

Without discipline we would have been a jolly shambles, a team only in name and familiar with defeat.

Discipline today is a touchy subject. Try disciplining a child at school and outraged parents are on the Head's doorstep demanding the surrender of the teacher. (In contrast, if I told my Dad I was in trouble at school there would be sanctions at home as well for letting the family down.)

Parents talk about never using negative words, never saying 'No'.

This merely makes a rod for their own backs and ensures that no other sane parent wants to host their unhappy and anarchic brat.

Parents talk about being their child's 'mate' – best friend etc. This is nonsense. You choose your friends. They may last five minutes. They may be for life. Being a mother or father is a completely different role and you only have one of each and it is for life. It is wonderful if, in adulthood, you are truly friends too, but that is not the central relationship and never can be.

The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that God is our Father.

As such, He disciplines us – because He loves us.

We are not to be discouraged by this. God is a hands-on parent. He is not a 'whatever' Dad, whose lack of discipline merely advertises a lazy carelessness. Who and what you are matters to Him. You are His sons and daughters.

He wants the best for you.

The Letter to the Hebrews does not dodge the difficult bits. Suffering. 'Suffering', we are told, 'is part of our training'. This is not merely being exhausted by endless press-ups or, in my case, being wiped up off the floor after an hour of Monday night boxing training with Grant and the boys. It is handling the disappointments and disasters of life, the illnesses of our fragile mortality and the debilitations of age. These things we train for in the gymnasium of the soul. Hebrews tells us, 'they are not pleasant' and Hebrews is correct.

But how we respond is vital. How we respond will make the difference. When people question the intention of God in allowing His servants to suffer, I can only joke, but seriously, that, in my case, all else having failed, God is trying 'sanctification through humiliation'.

The key is in the word 'sanctification'. Here, and in the Purification to come, our loving Father is making us FIT.....fit for Heaven. All things are to that end. We are preparing for life in eternity with Him in the glorious company of the Saints in light – about which we will hear much more next week in the follow on reading from Hebrews.

I do not want to be unfit for the team and neither do you.

The word discipline is precisely what happens to Disciples. The word disciple means, 'Someone who is learning, being taught, led on to become like the teacher, the Master. How are we to become like Jesus if we do not bear the Cross'

So, little brothers and sisters of the Crucified, remember that when these things happen, while, Hebrews tells us, 'it seems like grief and not joy', we are 'to hold up our weary arms' in praise, 'steady our trembling knees' and, on the straight path, push on to 'peace and righteousness' and that 'sanctification without which no-one will see the Lord'.

This is the precious road of discipleship. We walk in the love of the Father.

And the Father is leading the team to the victory of the Resurrection.

Let's get fit for Heaven.

