



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2019

***Readings: Amos 8: 4-7, Psalm 112, 1 Timothy 2:1-8, Luke 16: 1-13***

‘Sell the poor for a pair of shoes’

I owe a special debt to the prophet Amos. Beginning my academic Biblical studies, such as they were, some 44 years ago, the brief ministry and ‘career’ of this 8<sup>th</sup> century BC proclaimer of God’s Word, was my introduction to that extraordinary group of seers and preachers who acted as God’s channel to His, frequently disobedient, people.

Amos did not belong to that guild of professional prophets that, by now, infested the royal courts and made a living by institutional boot-licking. Hence he was quick to add the disclaimer,

‘ I am no prophet nor a prophet’s son.’

A Southerner- a fruit farmer – he was sent by God to the Northern Kingdom, luxuriating in its wealth, idolatry and injustice. He was not well received. Of particular offence to God, though not alone, was the economic system which allowed the ‘fat cows of Bashan’ – as he unflatteringly described the wives of the rich – to sprawl on their ivory couches (such bedheads were indeed found in the ruins of ancient Samaria) while the poor were sold for a pair of shoes. And who, ladies, does not need another pair of shoes?

Economic systems, then as now, were not incidental to the prevailing theology but rather a direct result of their credo. They hinge on that delicate balance between freedom and responsibility, the invitation to greed and the abuse of power.

There has been, in my lifetime, frequent and popular revulsion at capitalism – usually amongst its most obvious beneficiaries who have never endured its alternatives. Yet capitalism, by its unique ability to store and transfer wealth from the time of our greatest productivity to the time of our greatest need and dependence, has led to the most economically secure societies, compatible with universal suffrage and a safety net for the poor. What it cannot confidently survive is the perception that, as in recent crises, it descends into corporate theft and a ‘casino capitalism’ played with loaded dice.

But when a Christian society dumps its theology this is what happens.

In contrast we hear the siren calls of socialism. Since the excesses of revolutionary France there has been a futile attempt to square the circle of liberty and equality, with or without the context of fraternity. The failure to countenance the fallen nature of Man and the rejection of the neighbourly divine mandates of the Torah has meant that the incompatibility of liberty and equality has obliged enthusiasts to embrace the tyranny of the ever tighter garotte of state control. Revolutionary socialism, in its fancy clothes of Marxian philosophy, has regularly and inevitably reduced its adherents, subjects and finally slaves to economic misery and abject poverty. With its brutal levelling and state planning it has outdone all other disasters, natural, economic and political, in its toll of human slaughter.

It has no theology except ‘the death of God’ and that leads inexorably to the death of Man.

A follower of Christ, therefore, cannot be indifferent to the prevailing economic system under which he lives. But no human economic system,

mercantilism, capitalism, socialism, distributism etc, can assume his loyalty if it disregards the divine mandate.

I cannot sleep on my ivory bed while you starve and you are sold into slavery. Because.....we are both made in the image of God. There is, at the foot of the Cross, a divinely ordained fraternity for which, in my part, I must give account.

I cannot make you my equal – be that a promotion or demotion – because that is a false and repressive equation. But we can afford each other an equality of opportunity.

I cannot walk the earth as if I own it because I do not. I am merely a temporary steward of God's bounty and, when I return to that self-same earth, I will have to give account of that stewardship to my Lord and Master.

In today's Gospel we hear the fate of the unjust steward who, in cahoots with his shady clients, has massively defrauded his master. Jesus mockingly praises the 'worldly wisdom' of this treacherous charlatan. Jesus promises that the man will have a place in the eternal habitations - the everlasting dwelling place of his fellow cheats, thieves and chisellers who were happy to defraud their Lord and betray His trust and generosity.

As followers of Jesus we are stewards of the earth and stewards of the mysteries of Christ. The Greek New Testament word for 'steward' is 'economist'. It is two Greek words joined together meaning 'the rules of the house'. Each of us is, therefore, an economist. Our theology and our economics do not live in different streets. They live in the same house. Only by operating the 'house rules' of the Master, as individuals and as a society, can we be faithful, generous and just.