



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-October 6th 2019

**Readings: Habakkuk 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4, Psalm 94, 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14,
Luke 17: 5-10**

The Gospel is nothing if not controversial. Lots of passages cause people to start, be conflicted, wonder how they can achieve what is required, are astonished at what is being revealed.

Some people really struggle with the great revelations – Virgin Birth, Resurrection, Transfiguration, Miraculous Powers etc. etc.

These have never really been an issue for me. I struggle with the seemingly small things. ‘Turn the other cheek’, for example. Every schoolboy knows that, in the playground, if you let a bully bully you he will go on doing it. Punching him firmly on the nose will make him think twice before picking on you again. Same applies in international affairs. Hitler burgeoned on appeasement. As a result, I tend to compromise the Gospel by remembering that I have only two cheeks (four for the crude) and after that I run out of available targets and patience with my abuser. Today’s apparently anodyne Gospel is another struggle for me.

A few weeks ago I was in conversation with a very faithful servant of God who said to me that one of the sadness’s of her life was that she never felt appreciated. From forty years pastoral ministry I would guess that she is not alone. In my first parish the vicar never thanked anybody and never apologised. It taught me a lot. At the end of the first parish

event I was allowed to run I sent a brief personal note of thanks to all who had helped. It seemed a minimal courtesy. The response was dramatic and overwhelming. Some parishioners wept as they told me that it was the first time anyone had ever thanked them for their work. It was a lesson I have never forgotten.

Last week one of my children told me that a close friend, well known to us and much loved, had noted that they were unusual in the amount of encouragement they received. It seems normal to us but it was an interesting comment.

Jesus today, talking to His disciples, gives us this down to earth, apparently contradictory, advice.

You are servants. Do your job. When you've done it say, 'We have done no more than our duty'.

Do you expect the Master to be grateful?

Our human instinct is to respond, 'Well that would be nice!'

So what is Jesus trying to tell us – apart from the blindingly obvious?

The more extravagant of us look for, almost unconsciously, public approbation. But even the shyest have a longing for appreciation.

Jesus rightly warns against the desire for applause for what we do.

Because, the truth is that, if we are motivated by this end it will distort what we do, how we do it and how we relate to our fellow doers. It is a subtle but profound spiritual point. Self - advertisement, I speak as an expert, is the offspring of pride and insecurity. But it is not just the playground of the flamboyant and the gobby. There are myriad subtle variations that are employed by the more discreet.

Jesus is warning us off this particular and destructive territory. And, furthermore, though they could not know it at the time, His appreciation of and His love for His disciples, then and now, is not spelt out in empty words but in the sacrifice of the Cross. That, in the end, is God's ultimate statement.

Thus, if we are not constantly looking to God for a pat on the back and just getting on with our duty, what does that say about our normal human relations.

St. Paul tells us (I Thess 5 v 11) 'to encourage one another, build each other up'

The ministry of encouragement is one of the most important things we will ever do. When we are encouraged, just like small children, we blossom and thrive. We find the energy and strength to do what otherwise we may think is beyond us. Without the sun of encouragement there is no ripening – just a desperate quest for whatever thin gruel of light there may be. The great American humourist, Garrison Keillor, reflecting on the distorting misery of his Calvinist childhood and the long famine of affection and encouragement wrote this complaint. (95 Theses 95)

'For fear of what it might do to me, you never paid me a compliment, and when other people did, you beat it away from me with a stick.

'He certainly is looking nice and grown up.'

'He'd look a lot nicer if he did something about his skin.'

'That's wonderful that he got that job.'

'Yeah, well, we'll see how long it lasts.'

You trained me so well, I now perform this service for myself.

I deflect every kind word directed to me, and my denials are much more extravagant than the praise. "Good speech", someone says.

'Oh,' I reply, 'it was way too long, I didn't know what I was talking about, I was just blathering on and on, I was glad when it was over.'

I do this under the impression that it is humility, a becoming quality in a person. Actually, I am starved for a good word, but after the long drought of my youth, no word is quite good enough. "Good" isn't enough.

Under this thin veneer of modesty lies a monster of greed. I drive away every faint praise, beating my little chest, waiting to be named Sun God, King of America, Idol of Millions, Bringer of Fire, the Great Haji, Thundar The Boy Giant. I don't want to say, 'Thanks, glad you liked it.' I

want to say, 'Rise my people. Remove your faces from the carpet, stand and look me in the face.'

So, in short, fellow disciples, 'Get on with the job. If you want to know how much God loves you - look at the Cross of Jesus'.

BUT.... while you are at it, encourage one another. Build each other up. We all need encouragement. Think of someone you could encourage today – and do it. Make it a good habit. It is one of the most important things you will ever do.