



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-October 20th 2019

***Readings: Exodus 17: 8-13, Psalm 120, 2 Timothy 3: 14-4: 2,
Luke 18:1-8***

A number of years ago, while I was still enjoying what I call, ‘The Glorious Liberty of the Laity’, I went, as a piece of ecumenical outreach, to a meeting of the local Pentecostal church. To my delight it was held, appropriately, in the Upper Room of a local pub.

At the conclusion of a delightful meal we sat back to enjoy a talk on the Bible. As each extravagant claim was made for this remarkable set of archaeological documents, all eyes would turn to me – the known Catholic in the room. I would simply nod my head in agreement. To their manifest astonishment I appeared to assent to every one of their claims. How could I then be a Catholic? Had I not understood that Protestants broke away from the Church FOR the Bible? Catholics (or non-Christians as we are sometimes dubbed) do not believe in the Bible surely. It was an interesting evening.

First of all I had to introduce them to the teaching of the Universal Church on Holy Scripture. This we can find, most conveniently, in what is, for my mind, the most powerful document of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* – the Word of God – which underpins and informs the Catechism at every stage. *Dei Verbum* states clearly that there is one Word of God and that is Christ.

All divine scripture speaks of Christ and is fulfilled in Christ. As St. Jerome so succinctly put it: 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.' The Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God and, because they are inspired by Him, they are the Word of God.

God is the author of Sacred Scripture. He inspired the authors to write in human language the revelation of Himself.

Sacred Scripture teaches 'without error' God's saving truth.

The Church venerates Sacred Scripture as she venerates the Body of Our Lord.

In short..... no other para-church, ecclesial body or Christian organisation has a higher doctrine of the Bible. It is the BOOK of the CHURCH.

So, when we had cleared that little matter up, it was my turn to ask a couple of questions. The Protestant movement broke from the Universal Church on the authority of the Bible. Sola Scriptura was the rallying cry – Scripture alone is the answer.

The problems that arose straightaway were twofold:

1) The earliest 'reformers' did not like some of the very Bible they said was authoritative. Books had to be excluded. More than a dozen books of Wisdom, Prayers, History and Prophecy went in the bin. They mentioned things like praying for the dead which the reformers were keen to ditch. If Luther had had his way the Letter of James, with its healing ministry, confession and good works would have met a similar fate, along with the Apocalypse. From the 'get go' Protestantism was selective about what Scriptura should qualify as 'Sola'.

2) Even more significant was my second question.

Who decides what Scripture means? I had lived long enough in the soggy Anglican nightmare to know that, for Protestants, interpretation was an individual choice. When someone asked me, in my Anglican days, what the Church taught, I would give the traditional historic teaching. Only to be met with, 'Well the vicar down the road says the opposite and the

bishop says something else again.’

The problem for the ‘reformers’ was that there was no court of appeal, no Magisterium, no authoritative teaching, no unity in the Holy Spirit. No sooner had the protest begun than it fractured and has continued to fracture in a million splinters in the five hundred years since.

The immediate problem for the new believers was seen in the Peasants’ Revolt. Encouraged by Luther to read the Bible and come to their own conclusions, the Peasants decided the governing class were robbers and oppressors. They revolted. Luther, being protected by the same governing class, encouraged the ‘aristos’ to butcher the horny handed sons of toil who thought they had a champion in the vicious apologist for tyranny and anti-semitic, Luther.

For Catholics, therefore, the Sacred Scripture is vital but it is not at the beck and call of each new whim or political movement or social fashion. It is interpreted by the Church Universal under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God and in line with the Holy Tradition.

And here we need to understand the meaning of tradition.

It is not – ‘We’ve always done it that way. The forks go in the left hand drawer. We always give Uncle Arthur handkerchiefs at Christmas sort of thing’. Traditio is literally ‘what has been handed over, handed on’ – in this case the fullness of Apostolic teaching. The Holy Spirit is not self-contradictory. Thus the Magisterium (which simply means the teaching authority) is coherent and consistent. It is the Spirit of God – not the spirit of the age. The problem, as I see it as a relative newcomer, is that Catholics are often shy of the Sacred Scripture. They have, too often, bought the lie that the Bible is somehow a Protestant volume.

The reality is that our liturgy is Bible, Bible, Bible.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is larded with supporting Scriptural footnotes. The Companion to the Catechism – a mere 3000 pages - is awash with undergirding and foundational Scriptural references to the teaching of the Faith. In short we need to regain the confidence in

the Book of the Church as our book. We need to bathe ourselves in the transcendent mysteries of the Word of God and the tradition and teaching of the Church. St. Paul calls Sacred Scripture ‘the sword of the Spirit’ in the hands of the Christian soldier. (Eph 6). And in today’s reading he tells Timothy that it is ‘the wisdom that leads to salvation’. Indeed it is. Know it, love it, wield it, proclaim it - for it is Christ