

HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-November 17th 2019

***Readings: Malachi 3:19-20, Psalm 97, 2 Paul 3: 7-12,***

***Luke 21: 5-19***

South of the Colosseum and across from the Lateran stands the church of S. Stefano Rodondo, gracing the Celian Hill with its remarkable 5th Century grace and unusual circular design. Dedicated to the first Christian martyr, the Deacon Stephen, and latterly the national church of Hungary in Rome, it is worth a visit for the architecture alone – plus a chance to see one of the stone cathedra of Pope Gregory the Great – who sent the mission to these benighted isles. What nothing can prepare you for is the veritable ‘gore fest’ which decorates the interior. In the 16th Century the great reforming Pope, Gregory XIII, commissioned the thirty four huge panels that form the interior murals. Each one is the scene of a Christian martyrdom in all its horror. No punches are pulled, no romanticisation creeps in. Here, in all its grim reality, is etched the all too frequent cost of loyalty to Jesus Christ. Here, in forensic detail, is spelt out the barbarous cruelty which is the stock in trade of the ancient enemy of Man and his minions. Each panel names the suffering heroes of the Faith and each panel nominates the satanic emperor in whose name this terror was executed. Let no-one be in any doubt who (and what system) is responsible.

I begin here because, in today’s Gospel, Jesus anticipates the cost of following Him and, in His own Calvary, prefigures the martyrdom of His Church. (For those of you who follow the offices you will know that we have been deep in the revolt of the Maccabees and heard, last Sunday, of the martyrdoms that inspired their rejection of the pagan death cults.)

There is, in our time, much in the news about martyrdom – usually referring to Islamic violence. This itself often arises as a response to a wholesale rejection of Western secular values and an attempt to throw off cultural imperialism. The difference between Islamic and Christian martyrdom is that the former often involves killing other people rather than, in the latter, being witness to the faith and consequently being subject to violence and death.

Nonetheless, both involve a wholesale rejection of godlessness and the consequent social, legal and moral consequences. The mode of that rejection follows directly from the respective founders of those Faiths. Christ told Peter to put up his sword and willingly suffered and died to defeat the powers of Satan and bring Man the hope of eternal life. Much of the Muslim founder’s life was given over to battles, caravan raiding and the summary execution of those he considered enemies. The differences are stark.

We are not here to rehearse history except insofar as it informs the present. Sadly nothing could be more current than Jesus’ teaching on persecution, witness and martyrdom.

While we, in the West, shuffle uncomfortably around the wholesale rejection of our Faith, our mores, our laws and our fundamental civilisation which, heretofore, defended the Christian way throughout the world, the rest of the Christian world is paying for our indifference in blood and terror and exile.

In the lands of the East, the fountainhead of our Faith, the followers of Jesus are systematically bullied, intimidated, persecuted and driven into involuntary exile. The great historic churches are emptying. The land is abandoned to the persecutors. In the atheistic Marxist heartlands from China to North Africa the Church is under the brutal cosh of totalitarian materialism.

In the subcontinent, the resurgence of militant paganism and its enthronement in government has ratcheted up the brutal pressure on the long suffering faithful. In parts of Africa the gangsterism of brands of militant Islam has terrorised the Church, burning, looting, murdering our forgotten brothers and sisters.

We have moved, in our lifetime, from the relative calm of religious toleration to become the most persecuted century for Christians in our two millennia of history. And now, while we have too often been able to comfort ourselves by looking away or shelling out a few bob to CAFOD, the smoke of the burning churches and villages has begun to seep under our own sitting room door.

In Britain an unelected, unrepresentative judiciary has been able to impose the abortion law on Northern Ireland in the name of Human Rights via a compliant and morally bankrupt House of Commons.

Comment on moral evils are now gravely inhibited by branding any criticism by that slippery and misused term ‘phobia’ – thus curtailing debate in favour of the professionally organised lobby groups and the sympathetic media. To articulate objections to the unacceptable is to be overshadowed by the threat of indictment for that blanket accusation – ‘hate crime’.

Standing as silent witnesses for life, we are now excluded from the environs of the killing clinics. Objecting, with Muslim friends, to the indoctrination of our children by disordered sexuality, we are sneered at and marginalised by the very media for which we are obliged to pay. Seeking to criticise the acceptance of gender distortion as normative rather than, as historically, a mental health issue, we are howled out of the debating chambers of our educational institutions. (My own alma mater, Cambridge, recently disgraced itself when its Canadian Vice Chancellor, a liberal human rights lawyer, rescinded a visiting fellowship to his fellow Canadian Jordan Peterson, a leading spokesman for more traditional values. Toope drooled: ‘Cambridge is an inclusive environment and we expect all our staff and visitors to uphold our principles. There is no place here for anyone who cannot.’ For which read: ‘This is no place for those who do not agree with us.’)

This growing censorship extends to vast areas of the institutions.

In this land we are late to wake to the danger, little prepared for the battle. Too often our leaders have been well intentioned collaborators with the subtle and beguiling blandishments of the enemy.

What can we do?

First of all we can make clear our unwavering support of our persecuted brothers and sisters. This means:

1. Praying for them regularly and informing ourselves of their plight
2. Giving aid in good measure to those who support them in the front line. The most significant vehicle for this is AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED. And the Church urges us to do this especially this year on November 27th – Red Wednesday in honour of the martyrs.
3. Ensure that our voice is heard at every level. Write to your Church leaders, in their lonely job, and stiffen their resolve. Write to your political representatives regularly. Keep the issues on the agenda. Anyone can find their MPs email and draft a courteous but firm note.
4. Liaise and talk with those non-Christians who are equally concerned about the drift to tyrannical secularism.
5. Witness – martyr – whenever and wherever you can. And remember this is not just about the salvation of our civilisation. Martyrdom is always the unwavering witness to the love of God and its purpose, the supreme law of the Church, in Christ, is nothing less than the salvation of every soul.

( [www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org) is the website for Aid to the Church in Need)

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