



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Holy Family-Year A-December 29th 2019

***Readings: Ecclesiasticus 3: 2-6. 12-14, Psalm 127, Colossians 3: 12-21,
Matthew 2: 13-15. 19-23***

‘My son, support your father in his old age, do not grieve him during his life. Even if his mind should fail, show him sympathy, do not despise him in your health and strength’

At any executive meeting, be it the House of Commons, a company’s board, a meeting of charitable trustees, when a member is affected by any subsequent decision, he or she is expected to declare an interest. In the light of today’s Old Testament reading on fatherhood and old age I must own an immediate and profound interest.

Though we exercise ourselves greatly (and rightly) over the care of the elderly, the Book of Ecclesiasticus reassures us that this is not a new problem. Old people have always needed respect and care. The peculiarity of our problem is that we have, voluntarily, through the massive use of contraception in our culture, skewed the demography of our population to ensure that more and more old people are becoming dependent on less and less young descendants. This is not a recipe for happiness or social balance and, even if it were reversed now, there are parts of our continent that would take three generations to correct and some parts of Europe are beyond even that remedy.

The duty and burden of care therefore falls on the next generations – through no fault of their own – and few of them now will have inherited the Judeo-Christian tradition that has hitherto fuelled our human understanding. Politically there is a huge task to be done. Various parties have made a thumbnail sketch of what might be done but each new effort has been overtaken by the overwhelming growth of numbers, infirmity, longevity, dependence and cost. It is one of the more hopeful outcomes of our recent political turmoil that it is now widely recognised that action is urgent and that action cannot be partisan. It has to emerge from national cross party consultation and be agreed upon by all. No subsequent government can come and tear up the agreed consensus of care. This is both urgent and long overdue and we must both support and inform our representatives as they set out on this daunting task.

Very few of us here are unaffected by the issues raised and the burden of care. The Scripture gives us eternal context and spiritual priority. We care for one another in the context of our divine creation, within the knowledge of the love and mercy of God and with a responsibility that contains both hard work and patience but resulting in profound reward. Let us look at the promises. ‘He who honours his mother is amassing a fortune.’ The riches of this life are to be found in that love and devotion that draws us into the loving service of the one who gave us life, in whose womb, secretly, we came to be and with whom there will always be a foundational and formative relationship. Scripture tells us that a mother’s loving authority does not go away or wither with age and a family is blessed who strives to bring her peace and freedom from anxiety thus honouring the Commandments of God.

In honouring fatherhood the faithful child, of whatever age, is honouring God and atoning for sin. In his faithfulness he is ensuring that his prayer is heard and that his own children will learn from this example and be a blessing to him in consequence. Generational generosity rolls down the years.

These are mighty promises and the Scripture is not unmindful of the challenge. 'Even if his mind should fail', we are told. 'do not despise him in your health and strength'. The trials of dementia are not new. There is an intimate link between our love of God and our love of our family. It is no accident that, when Moses received the Law, Commandments on the sovereignty of God were immediately followed by the Command to 'Honour your Father and your Mother', adding the promise: – 'That your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God has given you'.

It is the only commandment with a promise attached. This is no accident. A society that rejects or despises family or attempts to replace it with ersatz substitutes and perverse alternatives is doomed. It is that serious. Our witness then is vital to the survival and health of our people. That means both setting example and taking every opportunity to contribute the divine wisdom into the necessary political debate.

But, while Christians honour the biological family, it does not stop there. The Universal Church of Jesus Christ is the Holy Family. We have become, in our baptism, little brothers and sisters of Jesus, children of Mary, sons and daughters of the Most High. We have a responsibility for each other and a love that overflows even the wide bounds of our patrimony. That is Mission.

In this Holy Family we are vouchsafed the understanding of the mysteries of the past and hold the key to the future. The mission of love is to a society that has, too often, lost its mind and its grasp on fundamental and eternal realities. Let us therefore grasp every opportunity for patient care and counsel to those whom God has given us to love and serve in this life and impart the gift of the Divine Wisdom to a society which has suffers from Historical and philosophical dementia – the dangerous forgetfulness of its origin and its end and its belonging.

