



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year A-August 2nd 2020

***Readings: Isaiah 55:1-3, Psalm 144, Romans 8: 35. 37-39,
Matthew 14: 13-21***

The Feeding of the 5000

Unless you are a keen reader of the international Catholic blogosphere you will probably never have heard of Pax Christi church, Eden Prairie in the Archdiocese of St. Paul, Minneapolis. It made the headlines a couple of weeks back because of its advertised policy of ‘Jesus to go – in an envelope.’ Echoing the language of Macdonalds, the church posted a video explaining that Communion would be available at the end of Mass. So far, so normal – inasmuch as anything is normal in these bizarre times. But then we are introduced to the ‘Takeaway Jesus’. Parishioners are shown exiting church via a table on which is covered in plastic bags containing consecrated hosts and exhorted to only take one to consume in their car. Why, I wondered, could the ‘customer’ not take more for those shielding at home? Surely we could in the name of compassion, and in the slogan of the Golden Arches, ‘Go Large’. EdenValley, of course, is just the ultimate ad absurdum of our situation. While I do not hold with the view that the imposition of our current protocols is a deliberate plot by modernists to debase the Sacramental currency, I am certain that, when we emerge from the current crisis, we will need to take a long hard look at both our liturgical practice, our response to crisis and our relation

with an increasingly contemptuous State.

None of us are comfortable with the current indignities forced upon our worshipping practices. Ordinary parish priests have been obliged, by law, to close the church buildings – mercifully, unlike the Anglicans, we have not been forbidden to enter our churches and offer private masses for our people.

On the re-opening we have followed strict orders on cleaning, protective equipment, no receiving on the tongue, no kneeling, masks, ‘dropping the Host’ – albeit it from a centimetre or less – into the hand. We have done so out of a reluctant obedience and a concern for the health of our people. But this cannot go on and, come the reckoning, there is a big conversation to be had.

May I suggest a few of the topics:

- 1) There is a noticeable and unhealthy divide, exposed by this crisis, over the supernatural power and omnipotence of God. Accepting that Mass was ‘not essential’ and Church was on a par with hairdressing and pubs in a time of plague is to relegate the divine to the realms of a hobby.
- 2) The ban on kneeling to God, at a time when practically every secular event witnessed famous people ‘taking the knee’ to a political movement was offensive. But we had already sold the pass on this years ago by ripping out altar rails and denying ourselves the time for calm, reflective, adoring, grateful receipt of the Lord.
- 3) The ban on receiving on the tongue has, as I understand it, little medical support as being safer than manual transmission. Properly presented, mouth wide open and tongue out, I have found less contact than, in normal times, with peoples hands. But, like everyone else, I would welcome some serious scientific input here.

There are many other areas of concern. These are just the headlines. When we emerge from the indignities that we have, together and albeit with good intention, inflicted on the Body of Christ it would be a good time to review our practices of devotion, both personal and corporate. One thing has become clear, brothers and sisters. Even before the onset of the pandemic, belief in the Real Presence among Catholics had declined dramatically in the post – Conciliar years. This will not be a coincidence or unrelated to the way in which we celebrate the Mass and our demeanour and devotion in the Presence of Jesus. The pandemic, with all its awful reductionism, at least gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we approach the great mystery of redemption and how we communicate that to the world.