



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year A-August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020

***Readings: Isaiah 22: 19-23, Psalm 137, Romans: 33-36,***

***Matthew: 16: 13-20***

Out for a walk I am often confronted by the sight of someone's dog charging in my direction. The owner, at a great distance can be heard shouting something along the lines of, 'Don't worry, he won't harm you.' I always shout back, 'That's good. Because if he does it will be the last thing he ever does.' Don't get me wrong. I like dogs but I like well trained dogs.

It's the same with children. When I was in my twenties and relatively newly married, we were subjected to visits from friends whose enthusiasm for breeding had outstripped their capacity for parenting. It was the beginning of letting the child develop unrestricted. Never, never say NO. We would watch while formerly rational adults would allow themselves to be tyrannised by their anarchic and unhappy progeny.

'Why don't you have children?' they would enquire.

My reply was simple: 'Other people's children', I would tell them, 'are the best contraceptive I know.' It was an effective conversation closer.

We determined that, if God granted us the gift of children, we would love them enough to discipline them, always be consistent and not allow them to put a cigarette paper between us – something which kids are very good at if they spot a chance of leverage.

Of course that meant saying 'NO'. Not always. Not necessarily often. But not shirking an unpopular decision. Supporting the other parent's authority and keeping any disagreements off the pitch and in the dressing room at close of play.

It's a counsel of perfection, I know. But it's not really much different in any walk of life. A partial employer who vacillates is deeply irritating and divisive. Fans on the terraces hate losing but most of all they hate an inconsistent or apparently partisan referee.

So here in 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Judah, the little kingdom is under threat from the mighty and barbaric power of the Assyrians. They have already smashed and exiled the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Only Judah remains. Isaiah is assuring the king that God will save them. The steward, Shebna, is negotiating a defence deal with Egypt. He is duly sacked and replaced by Eliakim. Isaiah tells us that the steward wears the key of the Royal Palace on his shoulder. What he opens is opened. What he closes is closed. He is the one who grants access to the King. He is the doorkeeper of the Presence. It is this very language and symbolism with which Jesus invests Peter and, through him, the Church. The power of the keys.

The use of those keys must be for salvation but they are also for the discipline and governance of the family of Faith, the household of God.

I remember helping out at a very difficult parish. Any number of parishioners went out of their way to tell me that, if I thought they were going to listen to the priest, I was deeply mistaken. It was, unsurprisingly and consequentially, a fractured and deeply unhappy family.

What we look for, long for, in those who are given the responsibility of being the stewards of the mysteries of God, is the knowledge that they love us, want the best for us, are consistent with the Faith and YES.....are prepared to exercise discipline if and when necessary.

Anything else comes under the heading of 'careless parenting'.

These things are never easy either at a personal, family or parish level.

One of the most difficult Pastoral decisions I ever made was to withhold

Communion from a couple in a church where I was serving. It's a long story.

I remember shaking with the gravity and awesome nature of that decision. But I had no option. The nature of the public scandal they fomented and the danger to themselves made action unavoidable. To allow them to proceed, Scripture warns us, would be to endanger **their** souls.

Imagine this little but terrible parochial dilemma writ large.

Our friends across the Pond are deep in throes of their Election campaign.

America is still the leader of the Free World.

It remains the one strong Western redoubt of Christianity in the wake of Europe's descent into wholesale agnosticism.

But, once again, as an American friend said to me, it is faced with 'the choice of two candidates that nobody sane would have chosen'.

The Church has no jurisdiction over the eccentric incumbent – though curiously he has become the most pro-life President of my lifetime.

The problem for the Catholic Church in America is that one of its sons is the challenger. It ought to be a time of support and rejoicing BUT.....that candidate, while waving his rosary and dropping hints about his closeness to the Pope, has endorsed a most anti-Catholic agenda on ethical issues and chosen a running mate with a history of persecuting the Catholic cause.

He comes to the election supporting the most extreme abortion platform, same sex and transgender demands. He continues to present himself for Communion.

The Church does not want to be partisan in its politics but it cannot ignore its teaching and its discipline – not just for the sake of Joe Biden's soul but for all its people who are watching and waiting.

Who bears the keys determines access to the Presence.

Pray for those given that terrifying responsibility and witness for our time.

Pray for the Church in America, her people and her bishops.

Love is sometimes a hard road. Good parenting takes courage.

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