



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday of Lent-Year B-March 14th 2021

***Readings: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-16 19-23, Psalm 136, Ephesians 2: 4-10***

***John 3: 14-21***

Today is Laetare Sunday, Rejoice, Jerusalem, mother of the faithful.

It is now sixteen years ago this week that I was at my mother's bedside in Treliske Hospital. She was dying and was fully aware of the fact. I asked her if there was anything she wanted me to do – immediately practical or, consequential, like looking after my father (which I assumed was a given).

Yes, she said, there was. Would I promise her that I would always care for my brother and look after one another and not fall out. We are very different people and have led very different lives but have never had spectacular fallings out or such like, so it was a surprise to me that Mum asked. It was, of course, the mother's heart. Unable to do anything herself now, she wanted us to keep together and, as best we may and for all our differences,, to love one another.

We both have faults. We can both be annoying – you have probably noticed. But over the sixteen years since we have got on pretty good and with relatively little eruptions. We spend regular time in each other's company and try to help out where we can. I do not know if I would have needed my Mum's dying reminder, but I am glad she gave it.

I thought about it a lot this week when I was recovering from the extraordinary public distress of another family, the royal family. Like you and all the rest of the viewing world, I do not know what is true, what is manufactured, what is contextual misunderstanding, clash of cultures, spin, generational confusion or malicious misrepresentation etc etc. All I do know is that there is no war quite so uncivil as a civil war. When we know each other that well the capacity for kindness or cruelty are hugely magnified. The accusations, all the more deadly for being non-specific and thus unanswerable, intensify division, lead to the mentality of armed camps, the trading of confidences – he said, she said – and pushes the prospect of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness ever further away. What started as a standoff rapidly spirals into tragedy. The bonds of trust are frayed then broken and the riptides of grievance drift each one apart.

I am no great royalist – I consider our quirky settlement preferable to republic -but I can only begin to imagine what it must be like to have your family laundry hung out on the media washing line while Grandad is lying mortally ill in hospital. Not good.

For you and me the extraordinary emotional upheavals of the House of Windsor are a soap opera BUT with potential political consequences. We, you will suggest, are not, thank God, members of the Royal Family.

That is certainly true in this immediate context BUT.....we are, of course, members of a much more significant ROYAL FAMILY.

We are sons and daughters, by baptismal grace, of THE KING OF KINGS. We are brothers and sisters of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This is a much more significant bloodline than any that the various ruling houses of our island history can lay claim to.

How we speak about each other in public discourse and private colloquy matters We are not, by Scriptural writ, required to be uncritical of error but we are commanded, first and foremost to love one another and to seek to build one another up in faith. Our primary aim is solidarity in

salvation. If we see fault in a brother or sister, we approach privately and lovingly point it out. If that fails then we can invite other close family to intervene. Only if this fails can we publicly disassociate ourselves from the error. We are not interested in sanctimonious self-righteousness but in salvation, brothers and sisters of Jesus, given each to His Beloved Mother at the foot of the Cross.

I say all this because it has not been unknown for the Church of God to rip up the seamless garment of unity in Christ by some pretty heavy-duty rows. We still live in the aftermath of the ruins of the Reformation and the Endarkenment.

So it's well to be on the qui vive for symptoms of such potentially Satan-satisfying schism and deadly division.

I have seen parishes divided into armed camps. Priests rejected for the 'wrong pattern of piety'. Ministries rejected because they don't suit the temperament of the local power brokers etc. This is disabling and demeaning stuff – much of which rarely hits the public forum. They remain usually, a private grief.

However, there is a growing tendency at international level for divisions to appear around the person of the present Pope. Some Catholics think he is the best thing since sliced bread. Others view him as a hazard to shipping. Some hang on every word as if in declaring Tuesday to be Thursday he is able to rewrite the calendar. Others, see the websites, see everything he does as a conspiracy against the historic faith. We are in danger here.

First – We are family

Second – as the Pope, ex cathedra, Francis is the definer and the boss but still constrained by the doctrine of the Faith. He is not at liberty to change the Faith. His sacred task is to defend, explain, exhort and hand it on.

Third – As a man, Pope Francis, like any Pope is fallible. He, like you and me and the greatest saints, is a sinner. He (we) doesn't call everything right in his humanity. Some sympathy here.

Fourth – Popes can be criticised. Paul called Peter to account in the Acts of the Apostles. We have had good popes and bad popes and everything in between. What we cannot and must not do is to assume the worst of every action of a family member with whom there seems to be some friction.

Speaking personally here, I joined the Catholic Church because of the inalienable authority of the Magisterium. I am not in the business of watering down that precious gift. But like many, I have questions on the way forward.

For example:

Some are exercised by the silence on the secret agreement between the Vatican and China.

Some are puzzled by the apparent applause for a new American President who goes to Mass and yet espouses the most vicious abortion laws.

Many are distressed by the repeated verbal dismissal of some of the most faithful servants of the Church as ‘rigid’ and unloving.

Many are conflicted by the apparent ambiguities in teaching documents and wonder why straightforward clarifications are not offered.

But, like it or not, this is all part of the messy business of being family.

Our task remains to hold together, to try to love one another – even on difficult days – and assume the best of the other guy who, while he may not be doing it my way is, presumably, trying to serve the same Lord.

We have been entrusted to the one Mother and she would be broken hearted if we put on a performance for Oprah or any of the other media vultures hovering over us.

We are the ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC and APOSTOLIC CHURCH – local and universal, the Family of God.

Let’s try to remember that in our dealings with one another.

We can’t do anything much for those in the public arena except to pray for them but if you want a holy task for Lent, if there’s someone in your

parish or your family that you've fallen out with, now's a good time to hold out the hand of reconciliation.