



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-July 25<sup>th</sup> 2021

**Readings: 2 Kings 2: 42-44, Psalm 144, Ephesians 4: 1-6,**

**John 6: 1-15**

‘Do all you can to preserve the Spirit of unity in the bond of peace.’ Eph. Ch. 4.

In 1988, as the Anglican Civil War approached its height, my old boss, Peter Moore, Dean of St. Alban’s Abbey, was deep in his herbaceous border. I was helping out and we were in serious conversation about the crisis and the burgeoning errors that would unleash the tide of feminism, disordered sexuality and gender confusion that now engulfs society and, back then, were fermenting in the liberal leadership of the church. Peter said simply: ‘Always remember that Schism is worse than heresy.’ It was a line I have often recalled as I watch the church and the churches reel from crisis to crisis in my lifetime.

The first question to ask is, ‘Is it true? Is schism worse than heresy?’

The evidence, briefly, may be stated most simply thus:

Because heresy is *de facto* false, it does not stand the test of time. It implodes on its own inherent conflicts. Take the great Marxist experiment of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. At the end of persecutions, famines, mass murder and economic chaos it collapsed in the overwhelming majority of countries

who had taken up this supposed beneficiary of the poor. Where it still obtains it is by ruthless power. That does not stop the malicious or ignorant seeking to re-impose this error because, like any heresy, it will come round again, flirting with the foolish, old lies dressed in new lingerie. Similarly, the ancient parasites on Christianity recur, Arianism, Adoptionism, Pelagianism, Gnosticism all crop up with monotonous regularity in sects and cults. They just put on a new costume for the party. But they are easy to spot.

Schism, on the other hand, disunity, is far less open to repair and renewal. We live in the aftermath of an 11<sup>th</sup> century rift which, courtesy of a bit of inept and hubristic diplomacy rent asunder the great churches of East and West and left a lingering trail of suspicion and resentment, infecting secular politics as well as ecclesiastical integrity, which has endured almost a thousand years despite the best efforts to mend and restore.

Similarly, the not unreasonable protest against corruption in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, toppled over into heresy and then schism. The Protestant Movement, or Protestantism, was soon not only ripped from the Church at the huge and continuing cost of blood but rapidly at war with itself, its abiding characteristic being schism, as, by sacking the Pope, each man became a pope in his own front room. You have only to watch American cable TV to see the logical end of this historical trend. All these bits cannot be put back in the box.

Nor is the Catholic Church immune to such temptations. There have been times when we have endured Popes and anti-pope, factions and frauds. By the grace of God alone we have held together. Nor is our own time immune from such ready factionalism. Anyone who has shown the slightest interest in Catholic affairs in the last few years will be aware of this unhappy state of affairs surrounding the present Pontiff. Some Catholics think that Pope Francis is the best thing since sliced bread because of his public displays of inclusivity. Others regard him as a grave

and present danger. What one side sees as generosity to, inter alia, the divorced is seen by the other as a weakening of the marriage bond. The possibility of married priests as an attack on the faithful celibate. The throwaway lines on homosexuality and transgenderism as a pastoral nod or a surrender to the perversity of the spirit of the age. The cosyng up to Islam as a inspired ecumenical gesture or a denial of the uniqueness of Christ. The secret deal with China as a necessary and hopefully protective concordat with a dictatorship or a deep seated betrayal of the persecuted church. There is not much middle ground. And the Pope does not help the situation by repeatedly and publicly criticising his priests. Whatever 'side' you take on all these issues, that is not good team captaincy.

Last week's brutal and accusatory letter on the Liturgy is just the latest, albeit the most spectacular example.

Is this stuff new? Not really. It comes down to the most ancient and regular tension in the Church and, before that, Israel.

There have always been two tendencies – the inclusivist and the exclusivist and there has always been tension between them. In order to be faithful, we need to understand how **both** have their place in the divine economy of salvation. God has raised up a peculiar people, 'a chosen race', 'a royal priesthood'. This people find its origin in the patriarch, Abraham – God's 'start all over again' man after the wreckage and hubris of Babel. He and his successors are to keep the true Faith. But Scripture also says that Abraham and his successors will be a blessing to all mankind – 'all the tribes of the earth will be blessed because of you.' (Gen. 12) In order to fulfil God's holy will and calling the Hebrews cannot mingle with the pagans nor worship their hideous gods. The Hebrews are necessarily an 'exclusive people'. Whenever they drift into worldliness they deny their vocation and their kingdom comes crashing down. (see most of the Old Testament). However, if they do not reach out to the world, how will the world be blessed. Salvation may be 'of the

Jews' but it is not just 'for the Jews'. So, the tension is real. Great prophets like Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah, priests like Ezra, Kings like Josiah, see the importance of the religious and tribal purity of their cause. Mingling means, all too often, diluting the Faith to homeopathic proportions, compromising the truth, ecumenising to the lowest common denominator and trailing down the short road to apostasy.

On the 'other wing', as it were, sits Ruth, Jonah, Isaiah, parts of Zechariah, parts of Genesis, some Psalms etc. showing an openness to the gentile world. Are these apparently irreconcilable strains in conflict? Absolutely not. They are both essential and essentially complementary. The 'exclusivists' ensure no drift into paganism and that the Faith to which the Gentiles are to be invited is the real thing. The 'inclusivists' understand that the Church, the called, the chosen, does not exist for its own sake but to bring men home to God and be a blessing to the world. We need each other as constant encouragement and corrective because exclusivity can quickly degenerate into heartless puritanism while inclusivity can rapidly decay into a careless moral chaos and a fatal misrepresentation of God.

In the days ahead it might be worthwhile recalling St Paul's clarion call to unity. And my old friend Peter Moore's pithy reminder – Schism is worse than heresy because heresy fails but divisions seldom heal.