



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-August 22nd 2021

***Readings: Joshua 24: 1-2. 15-18, Psalm 33, Ephesians 5: 21-32,
John 6: 60-69***

I am beginning to sound like a broken record. (You finally noticed, Father!) But the lection of the Old Testament reading leaves out a huge chunk in order to cut to the chase. (Yes, I know, Catholics like to get on with it and proudly boast a short attention span.) The trouble is that ‘cutting to the chase’ is all well and good but, all too often, it dilutes or removes the reason for the ‘chase’ in the first place. What am I banging on about?

Just this. Today’s reading has us stand with the People of God before Joshua .

Under his leadership they have left the wilderness wandering of Moses’ day and triumphed in the conquest of the Land of the Promise.

By the grace and power of God they have come into their inheritance.

And the great war leader is now dying. He calls them and us to a renewal of our vows. He rehearses all that they have been through and the mighty works of God in delivering His people, giving them victory and settling them in the land – against astonishing odds. Knowing the fragility of man’s fidelity and the tragic brevity of his gratitude, Joshua both reminds

them of their salvation story and asks them to commit anew. WHOM WILL YOU SERVE? – God or the culture?

The lection, for the expedient of saving ninety seconds of our valuable time, omits the history. The trouble with omitting the history is not just the old cliché, ‘those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it’ but, like much modern culture, leads to much more specific and unhappy consequences. Omitting history means that we see everything simply through the prism of our own ‘omniscient’ present. We are detached from our familial journey and our roots. Assuming the moment of our being to be the summation of the ages and, being materially content, we forget God, worship the culture and lose the gift of thankful hearts. Thus, in making God redundant, we rapidly assume the inevitable dictatorship of the self and of the present moment.

This is a decision which makes us no longer free but doubly enslaved. (The service of God is perfect freedom. The service of self is the hell of confinement to an ever shrinking prison cell.)

A culture that forgets its story is suffering from terminal senility.

So Joshua recites the formula of his people’s salvation history – the context and backdrop to their present reality and they affirm their loyalty to God. They are where they are because of what has been, because of the great struggle for freedom and, primarily and fundamentally, because of the grace of God.

Joshua advocates, by his action, what Pope Benedict referred to as ‘the hermeneutic of continuity’ – the golden thread that holds us together throughout time and ensures the coherence of the Faith and thus the Church. Benedict opposed this to the alternative, ‘the hermeneutic of rupture’, beloved of the revolutionary, the narcissistic malcontent.

The revolutionary, from Satan onwards, has preferred his own reasoning as an absolute. Everything must be seen and understood in the context of

this supreme fact. Because history inconveniently interferes with this tyranny, history must therefore be abolished. All markers and reminders must be removed.

So the servants of the dark begin again with Year Zero – from the French Revolution to Pol Pot. Everything must be understood in the light of their ‘new’ revelation, from the self-consuming guillotine of Jacobinism to the never ending Cultural Revolution of the maniacal mass murderer Mao. History is Satan’s enemy. And therefore the enemy of all the enemies of Man. (A gentler example: A convert friend of mine from an evangelical church recalled his ministerial studies. He had, he said, three volumes of notes on the Church to AD 90. Three volumes of notes on the church from 1517 – when it began again! And THREE PAGES on AD91 to 1516 when the real church did not exist!! ‘I realised,’ he said with simple candour, ‘that I had been lied to.’)

The Church too must avoid the tendency to an internal totalitarianism. She must resist the temptation to see the theological and ethical ruminations of our own age as somehow the summation of history and a new beginning in the light of which all else must be judged. (Some Catholics have this attitude to Vatican II- often without ever reading the documents). This is especially true of our own continent which, in our lifetime has been characterised increasingly by catechetical inadequacy and evangelistic impotence. A little humility would be in order. History is the touchstone of our authenticity.

(Wild, young revolutionaries and old men in a hurry are equally dangerous.) This age is in a continuum with all that has passed before. That is how we know that we are the Church of the Pentecost and not some man-made confection. We are the next chapter of the Acts of the Apostles not some pop-up cult. We are obliged to reject the hermeneutic of rupture – that is Protestantism at its worst. We pursue the hermeneutic of continuity. We are our history. We cannot adopt a ‘YEAR ONE -

GROUND ZERO' theology . Whether that claim is that the 'real' Church restarted in 1517 or 1962. That is the road to chaos and ruin. There is a proper coherence and continuity to the Faith without which we are no longer Apostolic. And if we are no longer Apostolic then we are no longer Catholic and if we are no longer Catholic then we are no longer One. The final shoe to drop, Holiness, is the immediate casualty. That has been the tragic evidence of the industrial level of scandals of our lifetime. A Church that overrides and rejects her story is no longer the Church. She has slipped her moorings. She is suffering from institutional dementia.

The people of God stand before Joshua and own their history and pledge their allegiance to the one true God. The role of the People of God has not changed. In reaffirming our faith and owning our history, our journey under the grace of God, we are not powerless but give courage to those in authority still minded to resist the Satanic slide into the culture and the totalitarianism of the present moment. 'As for me, I will serve the Lord', says Joshua.

Amen to that.