



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-September 19<sup>th</sup> 2021

***Readings: Wisdom 2: 12. 17-20, Psalm 53, James 3: 16-4: 3,  
Mark 9: 30-37***

Wisdom Ch 2 .

‘The godless say to themselves: Let us test the virtuous man with cruelty and torture and thus explore his gentleness. If he is God’s son, He will rescue him.’

A few years ago I was watching an interview with a very famous footballer. The interviewer asked him to describe the worst thing that had ever happened to him on the pitch, expecting the answer to be a missed goal or a particularly brutal foul. It was, as it turned out, neither of these. Nor was it the hot-headed verbal abuse that seems endemic to the game. Much worse than any slur on himself, his racial origin, his mother, this giant of the game, recorded that the worst thing of all was being spat at. This disgusting, face contorted act of inarticulate rage and contempt, he said, was unspeakable and unforgiveable.

I thought of this when I encountered today’s readings, the Old Testament and the Gospel foretelling the fate of Christ. I also reflected on the two most memorable occasions in my own life when I had been spat upon. One was on a March for Life in Westminster many years ago. As we moved silently and peacefully along, the roadside was festooned with

screaming protesters. Their faces were contorted and ugly with rage and hatred. Running out of abusive language some of the women began spitting. It was a truly shocking moment.

The other was, no seminarian will be surprised to know, at my Anglican seminary. A fellow student began circling me and spewing out obscenities inches from my face, leaving me covered in his furious spittle. It was not virtue but the sheer unexpectedness of this outburst and the shock prevented me from retaliating in a most unchristian manner and punching his lights out on the spot. I am aware that I can be irritating but this was a whole different dimension. His face I have never forgotten, twisted out of all recognition by demonic fury. Years later, standing in the Church of St. Louis in Rome, gazing at Caravaggio's martyrdom of St Matthew, I recognised all these faces in the face of the handsome torturer standing over the old saint, face filled with enthusiastic, inhuman wickedness, about to inflict pain and death.

It is, of course, not really a personal thing at all. The ragers and the spitters, the godless, are possessed by demonic fury. As the book of Wisdom says, they are determined to examine, explore, the very heart of human goodness by barbaric cruelty. Death is not enough. Every aspect of man must be tested by suffering.

The Cross of Christ is the ultimate battleground of this destiny-determining conflict. We are not fighting against flesh and blood here – though the presenters and foot-soldiers of evil may be human. We are involved in a battle with principalities and powers and the once 'light-bearing' Lucifer, Lord, now, of the Dark.

The fury that contorts the ragers and the spitters and the torturers is, in origin, his and the roots of it lie deep in the spiritual history of creation. Imagine, if you will, that you were an angel, archangel, cherub, seraph. Imagine the moment that you first knew that God had intended to raise above you this sorry bag of animated muck that we call Man – made in

His own image even. To obey or to rebel against the apparent absurdity of the Creator? In the answer to that lies Lucifer's rebellion and fall and eternal opposition to God and deep and contemptuous hatred of the human race.

Of course, to return to my spitters. The man in question was always otherwise charming. The ladies on the pavement would not have seemed otherwise out of place at a genteel middle class dinner party. But then Satan is initially charming, plausible, apparently reasonable. Hence the Fall. Like most priests, whose job is to be both a watchman on the walls and a patroller of the borders, I meet him not infrequently. Only when crossed does the contorted twisted face of Luciferian envy break through the thick veneer of charm. After all, if he went round in horns and a forked tail we would all know whom to avoid.

But wherever there is a war on humanity, on the innocent, on the church, on the family of Man, there you will find him loitering, setting the fuse, infesting the souls of the unwary, seeking to employ his glove puppets in the destruction of man and alienate him from salvation.

Too many modern souls think that they can be neutral in this war. There is no neutrality to be had. Who does not resist evil hands the field to the enemy. Such, to our sorrow, is the condition of the once Christian West.

In the 'examination' – the old polite word for torture – Satan seeks to find the mystery of God's inexplicable and 'foolish' love for Man by anatomising Man's very being and forcing him to deny God and dissent from His rule.

This, for those of us still awake to the ever deepening dark and danger, makes our work of the liturgy and of life the more urgent. All this roaring wickedness has been defeated on the Cross. Here, at the Mass, here at the re-presentation of the Calvary, we proclaim the triumph of Christ Jesus over the enemy of Man. As long as the lamp of the sanctuary still burns

before the Presence, as long as we kneel in homage here to the Lord in the Sacrifice of the Mass, there is a light shining in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome. Indeed the haunts of Hell itself have been harrowed by the Crucified. The Church of our time has too often forgotten that and failed to hear and act upon Christ's promise to Peter that The Gates of Hell shall not stand against the conscious wholehearted unleashing of the power of the Church – which is Christ's Body. There can be no compromise with evil – whoever that might offend. We stand, in the words of my old Baptist Sunday School hymn, 'On the victory side'. Let's be confident about that and go out and get recruiting. Old or frail we may be, but that does not stop us being strong warriors of the army of His grace.