



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-September 26th 2021

***Readings: Numbers 11: 25-29, Psalm 18, James 1: 5-6,
Mark 9: 38-43. 45. 47-48***

‘He who is not against us is for us.’

Many years ago, when staying with friends in Lincolnshire, we noticed they had some beautiful blue tiles in their kitchen. Exactly what we had been looking for. Enquiry elicited the source and we arranged to travel deep into the countryside to the tile maker. My host, also a clergyman, offered a quiet enigmatic word of warning. ‘Don’t let the owner know that you are religious.’

I was not unduly bothered as I have never knowingly backed out of a potentially evangelical encounter – unless a man is drunk and will recall nothing in the morning.

Arriving at the Mecca of tiles, we were greeted by a hefty bearded Greek proprietor who duly showed us the objects of our desire. We started to order. Ten minutes and we would be homeward bound.

‘How did you hear about us?’, Zorba casually enquired.

I mentioned my friend’s name. Fatal.

‘Ah’, he suddenly lit up like exposed phosphorous, ‘You are priest too?’ There followed an uninterrupted lecture of cheery correction for almost an hour and a half. We had a full exegesis on why the Catholic Church

was wrong – standard issue for the Orthodox, of course. A full explanation of why Anglicanism, though acknowledged to be on the right side in both world wars, was fundamentally faulty. Halfway through his apologia for the Orthodox he finally paused for breath and I grabbed the opportunity to offer my slim orthodox credentials and try to pay the bill and flee. Zorba was having none of it

The Orthodox that I knew were not orthodox at all. This casual damnation encompassed all the known Orthodox Churches. Then, gasping for air, I asked him who was, by his definition Christian and Orthodox. A look of triumph spread over his face. He thought I would never ask. It was the Old Kalendrists.

The Old Calendarists were those Orthodox who refused to accept the change from the Julian Calendar to the Gregorian Calendar – a change that had been accepted in Britain in 1752 – with the loss of eleven days in that September. This movement radicalised and split from the other Eastern Orthodox Churches and its members, the only true Christians, are out of Communion with everybody else in the whole wide world. As a final flourish Zorba produced a photo of some batty looking swivel-eyed monks leaning over their fortress monastery wall holding a banner to this effect.

Mercifully, at this point Mrs Zorba appeared, berated her husband, took our money and released us from further catechising. We spun the wheels accelerating out of the car park.

Zorba, of course, is a type. He is the *exclusivist* par excellence.

‘The only people in the world who are sane are me and you And I’m not too sure about you.’

He is the man standing with a sandwich board in Oxford Street calling for repentance who would be clearly disappointed if anyone of these

wretched undeserving passing sinners took advantage of this offer of mercy. He is Jonah depressed by Nineveh's repentance.

At the other end of the spectrum, intellectually, theologically, morally, historically, is someone like the legendary Karl Rahner, a huge influence on the final output of the Second Vatican Council. Rahner invented a concept of the 'Anonymous Christian'.

This was originally conceived as an idea that people who had never heard the Gospel might be saved by Christ, on their response to the Word of God as understood. This rapidly degenerated into an apologia for religious indifference and the subsequent source of those appalling Crematorium sermons which major on how nice the corpse was and how he/she would even now be enjoying the heaven that they had never believed in. Rahner's effort degenerated into Universalism – who, after all, has really heard the Gospel?- and everybody will be saved.

Everybody is really a Christian – i.e. 'a nice person'.

One must conclude, albeit sotto voce, that Jesus got it wrong.

The Sacrifice of Calvary was unnecessary. Evangelism is redundant.

This is the *inclusivist* position and its inevitable ad absurdum.

Neither Zany Zorba's Calendar Clan nor Rahner's reckless revisionism are Gospel. They are both demonic and disabling deviations.

The Church of God is inclusive and exclusive. You cannot become a member by inadvertence. It is an act of commitment and intention. You are not de facto excluded by any given trait of personhood. All are welcome though many consciously choose to exclude themselves by denial of God or unrepented sin.

In today's readings we see two examples of how this works. In the Old Testament God pours out His Spirit on the two elders left in the camp as well as the 68 out with Moses.

In the Gospel, the disciples are reprimanded by Jesus for objecting to others healing in Jesus name. He points out that, 'He who is not against us is for us.'

When the elders complain that the two who didn't 'come to church that morning' are filled with the Spirit, Moses brusquely informs the moaners that he personally wishes that everyone had been filled with the Spirit. It would make his job a lot easier. Being possessive about the grace of God is not an attractive quality.

Similarly the disciples are very defensive of the Jesus franchise. It's theirs !!! Jesus is swift to point out that actually the franchise is HIS. Childlikeness is a key to receptivity and ambition – using His power for our own self promotion is offensive.

Over the course of our lifetime the Catholic Church has gone from asserting that salvation beyond her borders is not possible – to an ecumenical outreach that is virtually non-discriminatory. Recognising the good bits, the GOD bits, of the other 'churches' and, indeed , Faiths.

There is both opportunity and peril here. We may see, in many evangelical Christians, a profound love of Jesus BUT no idea of the Church, the Body of Christ, where He may be found and where they may be fed. Where the unchanging Apostolic teaching resides, coherent and timeless.

We want them on board. They have much to offer our sometimes wearied Mission and they have much to gain in the fullness of the Faith and escape from the individualistic interpretations of the lone pastor.

In contradistinction, we cannot pretend that much of the compromised, culturally collaborationist 'churches' have anything more than a superficial and passing resemblance to Christianity. We need to distinguish and discriminate here. We still seek their conversion.

To quote the great Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,

‘We do not seek a Christ whom we have invented, for only in the real communion of the Church do we encounter the real Christ.’

I wonder whatever happened to him?