



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-October 10th 2021

***Readings: Wisdom 7: 7-11, Psalm 89, Hebrews 4: 12-13,
Mark 10: 17-30***

‘The Word of God is alive and active. It cuts like a two-edged sword only sharper – slips through the division of soul and spirit, bone and marrow. It can judge the emotions and the thoughts.’ Hebrews 4 v 12 & 13

It is sometimes assumed, wrongly, that the preacher sits in his study drumming up his thoughts on how best he may afflict his listeners with some good ideas loosely attached to the readings of the week. Anyone called to preach and teach (to sanctify and govern) which is the full Apostolic role devolved upon the priest by the heir of the Apostles, his Bishop, cannot get away with that.

First of all he must live with the texts in the preceding week. In the context of his daily offices, the prayers of the Church, the pastoral round, he must let the Word soak into himself and wait prayerfully upon God for the words that he is to give to his people on the Sunday. He is not there to either circumlocute, dodge the issues, or simply to see a sermon as an exercise in riding his own hobby horses down the Nave.

He approaches the pulpit or the ambo with a proper nervousness because he is bearing the Word of God and, correspondingly, an awesome responsibility for the welfare of souls. If a priest is not nervous then he

has failed to grasp the magnitude of his calling and the terrifying and glorious proximity of the sovereign power of Almighty God that is unleashed in His Word and made present in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Understandably then, any sermon is first preached to the priest himself. He must, as Hebrews continues, ‘stand naked and totally exposed to the eyes of the One to whom we must give account.’

We are, in short, utterly vulnerable and hiding nothing from Christ our Judge. Only when we have done this can we have the temerity to preach to others. The assumption that the priest finds the Word of God comfortable is an illusion. His daily and persistent exposure to the living, active, dissecting, penetrating, cleaving, cauterising, power of the Word is necessarily uncomfortable. He is being challenged by it, wounded by its piercing healing, purged by its clinical surgery, armed by its divine weaponry, trained by its instruction, encouraged by its proclamation of love and divine destiny, inspired to share the astonishing revelation of God’s mercy.

Every day we pray a chunk of that great hymnbook of the Church, the Psalms. It is a profound exercise in self-exposure to the divine mercy because we take on board for ourselves the panoramic expression of the full condition of Man. Every condition and emotion of Man is contained in the Psalter. We pray these prayers that God may penetrate our open hearts and cleanse them and fill them with His love and overflowing mercy. We pray these prayers to open the eyes of our soul to the magnitude of the divine glory. As we do so we are inviting the Holy Spirit to pray through us for it is He who has inspired the human authors of the Word written, to commit the Word of God to human language and printed word. This is the power of the Word.

The written Word, which we proclaim, is Christ.

In Jesus that Eternal Word is incarnate, translated into Man.

So, whenever we read the Word, we are recapitulating the encounter – in the quiet of the Resurrection morning by the empty garden tomb, in the storm on the Galilean Sea, in the stable at Bethlehem, in the thin silence of the still small voice to Elijah, in the supreme revelation of the quintessential being of God in the Bush of Fire and so on. All these words are about The Word - and that is who we preach. The awesome responsibility rests heavy on the preacher. He dare not misrepresent Our Lord. So, when we, at home or in the public liturgy of the Church encounter the Word, we might recall the awesome dignity and privilege and responsibility that weighs on us too as His witnesses in the world.

Years ago, when I first began training for ministry, we were presented with Holy Scripture as the intellectual object of our enquiry. Pinned out like a dead frog on a board in a school biology lab, we were to use our ‘critical tools’ to dissect the Word and examine its credibility. Scarcely surprising that the results were not helpful. The great modernist teachers had gone things completely the wrong way round. It is the Word who examines us, every part of the fabric of our created mortal being. Our encounter with the Word is a daily exercise in encountering Christ, our Saviour and, at the end of all things, our Judge.

The better we know Him, the more faithful our response, the less we have to fear and the greater our joyful participation in His mercy.

But we always approach the Word as we would the manger at Bethlehem or the hill of Calvary – in awe and anticipation and thanksgiving.

Such is also the lot of the preacher.