



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-January 24th 2022

Readings: Nehemiah 8: 2-6. 8-10, Psalm 1, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-30,

Luke 1: 1-4;4: 14-21

Many years ago we were privileged to visit the Orthodox Church in what was then, Yugoslavia. We were led by a kind and highly intelligent Anglican minister who was a considerable theologian and spoke twelve languages. After a very long overland journey we found ourselves in the dockland area of the ancient port of Zadar, cold, tired and hungry at two o'clock in the morning – and absolutely no sign of our hosts.

Fr X managed to find a late night cab driver and began a conversation in Serbo-Croat. Ten minutes later he returned to regale us with the fascinating information that the cabbie was fully conversant with the divisive theological dispute over the 'filioque' clause in the Western Creed. Unfortunately Fr.X was apparently incapable of finding out where our hosts might be, where we were in relation to where we needed to be or what time the first bus came. As it turned out our hosts were indeed expecting us at two o'clock – in the afternoon.

I often think of this little hiccup when reading today's letter from St Paul. Paul tells us that we are all part of the same body, Christ's Body. That we need each other. That we are differently gifted, have different callings etc etc. And we read the glowing list of gifts and callings.....

Some are called to be Apostles. Some Prophets. Some Teachers. Some Healers. Some powerful. Some wise. Some discerning etc etc Some speaking in tongues- some translating. Every one of these is high- profile and we are familiar with their attributes and charisms. They all have an element of glamour and public recognition.

But there are a couple of things in Paul's list that consistently go under most people's radar. Paul mentions a little unobtrusive word that is often translated as 'helpers'. Anyone can be a helper, an assister, a member of the backup team without which the upfront team gains little traction. The Greek word used also

implies something else besides 'helper'. It comes from the same root as 'perceptive'. In order to be of any real help you have to understand what's actually going on. Simply barging in with ready made solution doesn't cut it. We have a saying in our house, 'It's always a mistake to be helpful.' E.g. 'Has anyone seen the passport I left on the dining room table?' 'Yes. You left it there for a week so I finally put it back in the file marked Passports'. Clearly the last place one would expect to find it. Cue the chorus: 'It's always a mistake to be helpful.' In order to be helpful, we need to be perceptive, know the person or situation, to have sought God's wisdom on it. Then we can be truly helpful, enablers of the ministry to the Church, encouragers of the mission to the world.

The other semi-obscurd ministry is of what the Greek text describes as 'governings'... This usually translates as 'administration'. It has nothing to do with modern concepts of Government which are obsessed with legislating. Good governance means just that. It looks for ways of doing this which are most effective and true to its mandate. An Administration endeavours 'to keep the show on the road'. Someone with the gift of

administration, every bit as much a gift of the Holy Spirit as the more glamorous charisms, is vital to the well-being of any institution and especially so of the church. Good administration makes the burden of running something seem infinitely lighter. It brings order out of potential chaos and enables collaboration and planning. It gives coherence to the mission and sets the energies of the other ministries free to concentrate on their charisms. It is a 'backroom' ministry but an absolutely vital one. St. Paul tells us that accurate perception and good governance – administration – are gifts of the Holy Spirit. And, right on cue, the lection gives us the opening of Luke's Gospel where the faithful doctor begins his orderly account of the story of Christ and His Church, drawing together all the eyewitness materials, checking the facts, verifying the sources. While Paul is battling it out in the market squares, the synagogues, the law courts and the courts of kings, Luke is faithfully following, encouraging, discerning and recording. Without this remarkable 'backroom boy', this faithful administrator, our knowledge of Christ would be severely diminished, the letters of Paul robbed of context and missionary power and the history the earliest Church practically non-existent.

The front line troops need the backroom boys and girls. So let's hear it for the great unsung enablers of coherent ministry and mission – the admin dept. whose gift of the Holy Spirit enables and encourages and frees up the rest of the Church to fulfil the Gospel mandate