



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Lent-Year C-March 6th 2022

Readings: Deuteronomy 26: 4-10, Psalm 90, Romans 10: 8-13,

Luke 4: 1-13

‘And leading Jesus up the Devil showed Him, in a moment of time, all the kingdoms of the world and said to Him, I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms – for it has been given to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me and it shall all be yours.’

The short cut to power and the high road to glory – what literature later enshrines as the ‘Faustian bargain’- is the Devil’s second offer to Christ in the wilderness of temptation. Of course, like his first offer to Adam, it isn’t really true. This sovereignty isn’t his to give. He can only pass on the stolen goods and watch the consequent havoc unfold, relishing Man’s infinite capacity for cruelty to his fellow man. But the headliners of history, the names that dominate our history books and our collective conscious are the same tyrants who have struck this deal and built their empires on suffering and blood, from Alexander to Adolf, from Sargon and Shalmaneser to

Stalin

This is not the Way of Christ. It is never the highway to Heaven. But,

surely, if I (or Jesus) was in power I (He) could use it for good....

To gain this unfettered power, Satan sweet-talks, all you have to do is to become the slave of evil. Simple. Jesus, in His humanity, understands that all power belongs to God – there are no easy trade-offs on the road to redemption. The offer of the enemy is the fast track to Hell.

So here we are again. Ten days into an unlooked for and unnecessary conflict, the world has not begun to exhaust the vocabulary of contempt for the perpetrator – a heretofore shrewd and cunning operator. Within hours we have gone from posturing and sabre rattling to a long planned act of brutality and contempt for the sovereignty of nations and the sanctity of life.

I am not unsympathetic to Russia's foreign policy paranoia – A huge land mass with relatively small population encircled by a burgeoning China in the East, A ring of kleptocratic dictatorships in the South temporarily keeping the lid on a cauldron of Islamic grievance,

And, looking Westward, a recently and painfully triumphant enemy extending its front line ever deeper into the once mighty Russian empire and exacerbating a distrust of East for West that goes back as far as the Fourth Crusade. But even the most sympathetic would struggle to justify this level of unprovoked and ruthless state violence, never mind against fellow believers whom you claim to be part of your nation.

There is nothing so uncivil as a civil war.

For us, in the West, in addition to the feeling of impotent rage at the

impending triumph of the brutal bully, there was a frisson of familiarity surrounding the meeting in Munich. We have grown up and grown old mercifully free of conflict on our continent. While wars have raged around the world, we have been blessed by a biblical lifetime of peace. (A 'war expert' on the Radio recently reminded us that there are currently 8 major conflicts raging and over 40 'smaller wars'. Even smaller wars kill people and destroy communities) But, like it or not, call it racism or tribalism, the current victims of this outbreak of Satanic fury bear an uncomfortable resemblance to ourselves and the threat to the wider peace stirs uneasy memories of the wars our fathers had to fight.

This could be you and me. And, as the former NATO commander, General Sir Richard Shirreff, reminded us: 'Our security does not begin at the white cliffs of Dover but in the forests of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania'.

Practically and militarily this may be the case but you and I know that, in the end, our security lies in the hands of God and, both as a nation and as a continent, we have not only neglected God but moved rapidly in directions that usurp His authority and wage cultural war upon His kingdom. As we watch the tragedy unfold on our TV screens we can do three things, as the Holy Father reminds us. We can employ the weapons of prayer, fasting and alms. We can also remind ourselves of the Christian understanding of what constitutes a 'just war' -

The principles of the justice of war are commonly held to be: having just cause, being a last resort, being declared by a proper authority, possessing right intention, having a reasonable chance of success, and the end being proportional to the means used.

The present obscenity of war on the Ukraine falls at the first hurdle. What we are witnessing is the playing out of the Faustian pact, the temporary triumph of the diabolical. Wherever the devil convinces man of his gift of power, the price is paid in human blood. The bitter irony for the Church is that the leading representatives of both opposing empires, Russia and America, both ship up regularly at church. Both men have bought the demonic deal of the second temptation of Christ. Power in exchange for the triumph of evil. For while Putin publicly and proudly sheds the blood of his Ukrainian brothers, Biden is preoccupied with ensuring the hidden deaths of millions of unborn Americans by his policies and by his appointments.

In presenting themselves at Communion, both spit in the face of Christ and their respective church authorities ought to be doing something about that, lest they be in dereliction of the Scriptural and Apostolic duties of care for their souls.

The hallmarks of wickedness and virtue are not difficult to identify:

Wherever the Devil is in the ascendant in Man, he brings death to the living.

Wherever Christ is in the ascendant in Man, He brings the dead to life.

Pray that these men may yet join us and their nations in repentance and thereby not only save their own souls but the lives of millions.