



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-June 26th 2022

***Readings: 1 Kings 19: 16. 19-21, Psalm 15, Galatians 5: 1. 13-18,
Luke 9: 51-62***

Stop me if I've told you this before.... What an invitation! But after forty odd years of preaching it's hard to recall who you've told what.

Anyway.....

Many years ago I had the misfortune to be sitting in an Anglican Synod meeting where an equally young clergyman was giving it large from the podium on the subject of his enthusiastic agreement with the current direction of travel. (Translation: Bishops please note). A grizzled elderly veteran of some pretty bleak parishes, sitting next to me, leaned over and whispered feelingly, 'You know there is nothing quite so revolting as the sight of naked ambition in a young clergyman'

Amen, brother, Amen.

The more skilled operators know how to disguise this unpleasant power lust whether it be for local, regional, national or universal office. It is traditional for even the most ambitious Cardinal to chastise his brethren as they elect him to the See of Peter .

'What have you done to me?' he cries – not unreasonably in truth and 'I am not worthy etc etc.' To which, be the promotion local, national or universal I always want to reply. 'You are quite correct,

brother, and the moment you or I forget our unworthiness to hold ministerial office for the Lord, at whatever level, then we are all in deep trouble.'

So, to this morning's readings. James and John, they of the fiercely ambitious mother – and these apples haven't fallen far from that particular tree – , are full of themselves and the coming glorious kingdom in which they will have top posts as key courtiers of the sovereign Lord. Rejected by a Samaritan village, their immediate response is to ask God to burn down the whole revolting and unwelcoming shooting match. 'Let's show our power and teach them a lesson!' Evangelism by incineration. The Gospel simply records that Jesus gave them a right earful. Even at this late stage of the game, they haven't got the message. For the rest of the passage Jesus, perhaps understandably, doesn't seem in the cheeriest of moods.

'You want to follow me? It's life on the road. Go where you are sent. No place to call home.'

'You want to hang around until your father is dead? You have a greater priority than that – preaching the kingdom.'

'Family commitments? Sentimentality? You either come when you are called and don't look back or you not on this team'

Jesus is certainly not selling membership as a tremendously attractive option. 'Happy clappy, Heaven's just around the corner', He aint.

While the disciples are fantasising about the gorgeous robes they will wear in the palace, Jesus is anticipating the Cross.

Cut to the Old Testament. Here the great prophet Elijah is preparing for the final stage of his remarkable ministry, obedient to God's Word revealed. He has gone down to Abel Meholah, to the wealthy estate of Shaphat. There he encounters his promised successor, Elisha, heir to the estate, significantly ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen – one for each of

the tribes of Israel. As he walks alongside the young man Elijah casts his cloak over him, thereby signifying that this is his spiritual heir. Elisha is in no doubt of the significance of this 'ordaining' gesture and runs after Elijah to confirm his willingness to follow him. As an earnest of his intent, Elisha sacrifices a pair of oxen and uses the plough as fuel to cook them. And then he feasts with the men of the field and Elijah before setting out on this great and unknowable adventure of Faith. There is no going back, the past life of the wealthy estate smoulders behind him. The mysterious cry of Elijah rings through the air. 'Go back, go back. What have I done to you?' The roles are reversed. Instead of the ambitious man pretending to be shocked and humbled by his election, it is the elector who knows what the cost is. Elijah has been – always will be – the great prophet – the one who symbolises the whole prophetic witness at the Transfiguration. He knows the cost of the prophetic ministry. He has endured stark loneliness, vicious persecution, deep depression, rejection, exile, tumult, famine, triumph, and disaster. He knows only too well the cost of speaking the Word of God to a society that pretends to faith but worships prosperity, materialism, Mammon. He has experienced the high price of faithfulness in a promiscuous nation. 'What have I done to you?' Indeed.

As it turns out, Elisha has a very different experience from Elijah and is ambitious from the outset – not for secular power – but for the kingdom of God. He will ask God for the extraordinary gift of 'a double share' of the spirit of his master and mentor, Elijah, not for self-aggrandisement but for the glory of God. That, surely, is the hallmark of the true servant of God. Void of ambition for himself, ambitious only for the Kingdom of God and utterly realistic about the cost of bringing that kingdom in.

We know what it is like to minister in a society that has largely abandoned God and is increasingly intolerant of the 'fools' like you and me who have not.

As we contemplate the mission of the Church in the days to come, we ask for the prayers of Saint Elijah and Saint Elisha to accompany us and encourage us. Each and every one, on whom the mantle has fallen, has much to do and much to celebrate, but we need be in no doubt of the trials that lie ahead and that the journey home always leads through the triumphs of Carmel and the commissioning at Sinai, through the war with the Old Enemy, through the battle with resurgent paganism and finally through the suffering and sacrifice of the Calvary. No ambition for self – all ambition for God.