



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-July 10th 2022

***Readings: Deuteronomy 30: 10-14, Psalm 68, Colossians 1: 15-20,
Luke 10: 25-37***

Pubs, in my experience, do not loom large in the culture of the Bible. As far as I am aware they merit only two mentions in the New Testament, one of them in today's Gospel. They have a place in the history of Christian Literature and pilgrimage. For example Chaucer's great poem of pilgrimage, *The Canterbury Tales*, begins in a pub in Southwark (The Tabard) and wends its way to the shrine of Thomas a Becket via a series of watering holes, at which the pilgrims seek to entertain each other with significant and often self-revelatory stories. The great literary brotherhood of The Inklings, Tolkien, Lewis, Williams and Barfield, met regularly at the Eagle and Child in Oxford. Commonly known as 'The Baby and the Bird', it was the birthplace of some great works of Christian Literature – from Lewis's apologetics through the great fantasy novels of Tolkien and the profound understanding of the dark side from the converted occultist, Williams. The Eagle was the Gospel of St John, The Child he presented to the world was Jesus. At one spectacular low point in the doctrinal wobbles of the Church of England, a small band of us got together in Cambridge to found 'The Full Faith Society' one winter's evening in the 'Zebra' public house. We chose the 'Zebra'

because it was the only place where things were still 'black and white'!

Today's gospel sees us back with the famous story of the 'Good Samaritan'. The story arises out of an encounter with a sharp mind who sets out to test Jesus. Having apparently agreed on the fundamentals of the Faith, the lawyer asks Jesus to define this notional neighbour whom we should love. We are all over familiar with the text. The unfortunate, undefined man travelling on the infamous bandit road from Jerusalem to Jericho is grievously assaulted, robbed and left for dead. We know no more. He is going the wrong way and at great hazard. Perversely, those who might be expected to help him, fail absolutely in their duty, preferring the outward sign of ritual cleanliness to the inward reality of the compassionate duty of the heart which that very cleanliness is supposed to illustrate. The natural enemy, the Samaritan, whose name the lawyer cannot even bear to speak, turns up trumps. He illustrates in hard reality the compassionate heart of God. Unafraid of the mess and obligation and effort of engaging with the beaten, broken man, he sets about doing everything he can to save, heal, restore and renew the victim. His task then is to get the broken man to the house of healing. He brings him to an inn. There he pays for his upkeep until his next visit and hands over the care. The Inn is a place of hospitality, respite from the journey, companionship, where the traveller is fed and watered and rested before resuming the journey. One cannot help but see in this metaphor an image of the Church. Our rescue mission of salvation is bringing home the lost and defeated, the robbed and ruined, to the place of encounter with the Host and the convalescence of the soul. The individual pilgrim may be able to rescue and minister to the battered and bruised victim of the unwise journey, the dangerous route, but then he must bring him to the house of healing and hand him over to the Host but with promise of companionship and continuing support and return.

When we encounter the broken, the misdirected, the wounded and the helpless, we are to follow the direction of the merciful heart of God and, ministering to them at first where they are, gently bring them home to the house of bread and wine and to the Host. Jesus himself knew of an Inn where that welcome was denied. The desperate were turned away to give birth in a barn. The Church was never to be like that. The first job of the evangelist is to minister where the traveller is, to aid the journey to the house of healing, to welcome and accompany and support. The victim of the sinfulness of man, even of his own foolishness, is to be welcomed home with mercy. In the famous Cornish painter, Harold Harvey's, great picture of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, a contemporary portrait of the pilgrim way, there is an Inn. The Holy Family, at rest, are backed by the hills of Penwith. Here the Christ child sits on the harbour wall giving His blessing to us. The signpost on the way is the Cross. The Inn where they find respite is 'The Lamb and Flag' – the secret sign of Catholics under persecution – the sign of the Church where hospitality and healing, mercy and love are always to be found. It is the same Inn to which the unlikely saviour of today's gospel brings the wounded man. It is the same Inn where we welcome the Holy Family in whatever guise they come. We are both the travellers who bring the beaten home and the potboys, chambermaids, ostlers, barmaids, cooks and glad welcomers of the weary and the wounded at this very public house. The oil of healing and the bread of life are here. That is our model. That is our purpose. That is what Jesus asks of us. That is both the fulfilling of the Law and the fountainhead of Grace.