



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-September 4th 2022

***Readings: Wisdom 9: 13-18, Psalm 89, Philemon 9-10. 12-17,
Luke 14: 25-33***

'If anyone comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.'

Some mistake, surely. Perhaps, you might think, Jesus has been misreported. After all it's not the usual picture we are given of 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild', the fluffy bunny version of the Incarnation of God in Man. It is a million miles from the milksop Messiah we too often serve up to our children (and, for that matter, ourselves).

But, no. There it is in canonical gospel, recognised as a true and historical saying of Jesus the Christ.

What are we to make of it. The Greek word root is *miso* as in misogynist – hater of women, misanthrope – hater of mankind etc. etc.

Perhaps it should be put down to Jesus having a 'bad hair day' and just venting off steam. Or maybe it is the famous redoubt of difficult passages, 'traditional middle eastern hyperbole'. This is the word that means 'to throw beyond', to exaggerate for effect – eg I've waited an eternity for this bus OR This shopping weighs a ton. In an Istanbul market I was once offered clothing 'cheaper than ASDA' and when that

failed, 'cheaper than shoplifting'. We understand it's not literal. It's hype.

(My favourite is my Naval son's preferred dismissal of an appalling option as, eg 'I'd rather set fire to my own pants than support Manchester United'. Actually that's not a good example of hyperbole as it is probably literally true)

Well the hyperbole option really won't do either. I want to suggest that it is what it is. And it's a proper antidote to the soppy sentimentality that is all too often served up as a Christianity – lite thin gruel theology.

In order to purge the gospels of uncomfortable sayings of Jesus, the shredder would be red hot. Jesus, for example, speaks more about Hell than the rest of Scripture put together. Dives and Lazarus, the Unforgiving Servant, the Foolish Virgins, the Last Judgement, the Wheat and the Darnel, the Wedding guests who don't come. Jesus is explosively condemnatory of the religious authorities. He is vigorously rude to the Syro-Phoenician woman. Jesus takes a whip to the pollutant temple traders. 'I have not come to bring peace but a sword.' He compares his chief lieutenant to Satan – the opposer of God. Today's speech is not a one off. Jesus is not a silver-tongued flatterer.

Au contraire.....as the riotously anti-establishment poet, William Blake, wrote in his poem, 'The Everlasting Gospel',
'If he'd have been Antichrist, creeping Jesus,
He'd have done anything to please us.'

The truth is that, as recorded in the night visit of Nicodemus, 'God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that WHOSOEVER believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.' John 3 v16. But that love has consequences and choices have to be made. If we are to love and follow Jesus that priority is all consuming. Nothing, not even our own lives must stand in the way. The Way of the Cross is not for

compromisers or collaborators or cissies. Nothing must be allowed to possess us except the love of Christ. This is tough counsel but it is what Jesus says. And He says it in the context of counting the cost. Don't set out to build a tower unless you are determined to finish it. Don't go to war against an overwhelming opponent unless you can genuinely foresee victory or settle for peace. Count the cost. If you are willing to sacrifice everything then you will be close to the heart of God, close to the meaning of true freedom, close to the gates of eternity. Close to Jesus.

Jesus doesn't always say what we want to hear. In the end, when we have sacrificed it all, refused to be possessed by possessions, preferred the family life of Heaven to the family life of earth, then Christ will restore all these gifts to us. His own Blessed Mother, apparently snubbed in the search for Him as both child and adult, is there at the foot of the Cross and lovingly gifted to the disciple as his own mother. We use the language of 'hate', as Jesus did, to distance ourselves from anything that would hinder our following Him. We are not merchants of hatred but rather prioritisers of that love which is eternal and salvific.

It is a tough and uncompromising love – it endures the Cross. It is a love that purges sin and defeats the forces of the dark. It is not saccharine sentimentality but rather the divine, purifying passion from which all worthwhile and enduring human love draws its strength and beauty, its endurance and its hope for the future and its destiny in the forever of God.

If He had been Antichrist, Creeping Jesus, He'd have done anything to please us;