



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022

**Readings: Habakkuk 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4, Psalm 94, 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14,  
Luke 17: 5-10**

Anyone who has walked through the ruined streets of the once great port city of Ephesus, will appreciate its significance in the ancient world. From the still standing mighty façade of the ancient library through the stumps of shops and houses, past the solitary remnant pillar of the Temple of Diana to the bathhouse and astonishing communal loos, we are transported to the world of the Early Church. And, in our liturgy of the word, we are deep into the letters of St Paul to Timothy, who was to become the first Bishop of Ephesus. A little background....

Timothy was a native of Lystra. He was an early convert and became Paul's trusted companion and protégé. His family were a mix, Gentile father, Jewish mother and grandmother (Lois and Eunice). As Jews take the bloodline from the mother this was significant though he had not been circumcised. (Paul did this later to enable Timothy unrestricted access to the Jewish communities and holy sites.) We are told in 1 Corinthians 16 that he was a reader of Scripture from childhood. So he is a religiously brought up young man in a technically, via his father, pagan household.

We learn from this the importance of the patient, faithful example, witness and teaching of the womenfolk in the household of faith. Many years ago I was listening to my good friend the Orthodox Rabbi. Asked about the then pending decision of Anglicanism on Women Priests, he said that the holiest woman he knew was his grandma. She rarely went to Synagogue because that is where the men learnt their faith. She was the priest of the home and, in carrying out the rituals and prayers and observances required of a Jewish home, her spirituality and influence was huge.

So, although we know that future church attendance of our children depends often on the influence of the father, the regular faithful groundwork of the mother (and grandmother) has a great part to play. Timothy was home educated and encouraged in the Faith.

Now let's look at what St Paul has to say to his favourite son. First, in this passage, he exhorts Timothy to 'fan the flame' of the Faith. The gift of the Holy Spirit at the Confirmation and ordination of Timothy replicates the fire of the Pentecost. And this fire is no accident. The fire is not spontaneous combustion. It is carefully laid. When, as a youngster, my grandma taught me how to lay a fire, it was very precise. You cannot put a match to the coal. There are different grades of combustibility. You begin with scrunched up paper, offering as much surface as possible to the match. It is followed by raggedy edged thin wood/kindling which in turn is topped by the dense carbon blocks of coal. Each stage leads to another. Each is essential. Each does their job. In order to arrive at the deep long-lasting burn of the flame and maximum heat, the fragile flickering flame of paper and wood have to bite deep into the dense stuff of the coal. It is a metaphor. The paper/ the Scripture sets our heart ablaze. It leads to the wood of the Cross. This in turn alone sets holy fire to the dark and sinful heart of Man and

causes him to glow with the glorious, purifying power of God. In addition this will not work if the grate is blocked with ash. We need a regular clearout and that is penitence/confession. Impenitence extinguishes the flame.

The flame, the fire of Faith, the work of the Holy Spirit given to us needs 'fanning' and feeding or it will go out. When people despair of their spiritual efforts and feel the flame has gone out it is often because they have neglected the paper (Scripture), not come to the Cross and, the most frequent cause, left the grate blocked with the ashes of the consumed and consuming sins.

It is never too late to relight the fire.

And then the flame maybe fanned. We are to be a people of encouragement, a people who build one another up. We all know what's wrong with the other person but our job is not to emphasise the negative, except where it is utterly disabling, but to encourage the positive.

We have all been given gifts of the Holy Spirit. If they are no longer working in your life then run through the checklist of what might be wrong.

Then Paul tells Timothy to insist on 'sound teaching' – that is to say 'Orthodoxy'. The job of the priest, from the humblest parish priest to the Pope is, in Paul's words, is, in the words of the old translation, to 'GUARD THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH' so that you may hand it on intact.

The Traditio, the Teaching of the Church, is not a fiefdom of personal opinion or a circus that moves with the culture. It is God given for our salvation and we are to be stewards of the mysteries of God, Encouragers, firelighters and relighters, kindlers of the sacred flame – versed in the Word of God, found often at the foot of the Cross, purged

of the ash of dead sin, burning deeply, powerfully and long in the heart of our being until all is consumed in bringing that light and warmth and energy and transformation to a world that has grown cold to its Creator and, in our culture, hostile to His mercy in the Cross of Jesus.

Saint Timothy pray for us.