



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-November 10<sup>th</sup> 2022

***Readings: 2 Maccabees 7: 1-2. 9-14, Psalm 16, Thessalonians 2: 16-3. 5, Luke 21: 26***

In the year of Our Lord 121, Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia, wrote to the Emperor Trajan seeking guidance. He had arrested a number of Christians – a growing sect of sub-Judaism but without their privileges. He could find nothing wrong with them but, if they refused to worship the gods of Rome and refused to curse Christ, then he had executed them. Was he right to have done so? This is an extreme case of *ex post facto* – applying any law retrospectively. Had Trajan dissented of course Pliny could not have undone the sentence. Luckily for Pliny, Trajan approved his *modus operandi*. His advice was simple - ‘Don’t seek them out. Don’t take unsigned ‘tip offs’, but if they pop their heads above the parapet, cut them off. They don’t need to have done anything. The Name is enough to convict them of a capital offence.’ For two hundred years that defining wickedness characterised the imperial persecution of the Church. Then, suddenly and dramatically, with the triumph of the convert Emperor Constantine at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, Christianity began its ascent to the civilisation that formed us and guaranteed our freedoms and humanity long after we, as a culture, had ceased to believe in it. When the fate of the empire hung in

the balance, Constantine was granted the heavenly vision of the Cross of Christ and the divine command, 'In this sign, Conquer !' Thus it was until our lifetimes.

Now the signs of pagan recrudescence are all around us in the gathering dark. We could rely on the materialist godless empires, like China, to carry on the work of the enemy but now the very heartlands of the Faith are being overtaken by the same powers. Governments and big Corporations line up to applaud and assist the lobby groups most hostile to Christian teaching.

Our education system is being hijacked to insist that we tell lies about the nature of Mankind and the human Family and the deepest parts of our identity and integrity.

On an individual level people are being picked off as a warning to others. Caroline, a Surrey vicar's wife who offended an activist by saying that a woman was indeed a woman, was arrested over family breakfast and her computer seized by the same force that could not spare the time to turn up at a friend's burglary.

The Finnish MP who was charged similarly for putting up a Bible verse on line and spent a year battling the courts, asserting the same inalienable truth.

The Irish teacher who is still in Mountjoy prison for refusing to use Woke pronouns in his church school.

A respectable American father of seven, Mark, a prayer witness outside an abortion clinic, whose house was surrounded by half a dozen vehicles and over twenty heavily armed FBI gunmen, arrested in front of his children without warrant on a minor charge that had been dismissed in court a year earlier.

All of this is small beer beside the growing assaults on the Church in other continents but, nonetheless, significant warnings - no longer early but increasingly late in the day.

I thought of these growing signs of the times as, recently, I stood in a little cellar chapel in the church of the Monastery of Tre Fontane. In this Trappist monastery, their brothers The Martyrs of Tibhirine, murdered by Islamic terrorists in Algeria in 1996, are remembered. Down in the little cellar the whitewashed walls, the stone flags, the small light from the narrow window, I knelt to pray as in the years past. It was the place in which St Paul spent his final days and wrote the letter to Timothy which we have been following on recent Sundays. Shortly thereafter he was taken some 50 yards up the sloping ground and tied to a pillar and, being a Roman citizen with privileges, was beheaded instead of being crucified. His crime was to preach Christ, the love of God for Man and our hope of eternity. And to reject the death cult of pagan materialism with its despising of life and glorification of moral disorder, its hatred of Man and the consequent inevitable disintegration of just laws, healthy culture and enduring civilisation. Martyrdom, witness even to death, is coming back into fashion. In today's OT reading we hear the story of the heroic Jewish martyrs who refused to deny God and submit to evil in the face of demonic rage and cruelty. In today's world we read of the suffering of the Church in China, the brutal intolerance of the Church in Pakistan and the regular mass murders of Christians in Nigeria and the destruction of churches by Islamic terrorists, secure in the knowledge that the once - Christian West has abandoned the Faith and will not lift a finger to help.

On 23rd November, Aid to the Church in Need will be issuing the latest report on Christian martyrdom and asking us to stand in solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters on RED WEDNESDAY by giving, by

praying, by signing the petition and by witnessing in our time and in our land for the Gospel of Christ – whatever the cost. Every Christian is called to be a martyr – that is to say ‘a witness’. We may pray, with Christ in Gethsemane, to avoid the suffering if possible. But, if it comes, then we will take it – in solidarity with Him. And we will do so, not out of some masochistic self-righteousness, but out of unshakeable faithfulness to God and out of a deep love of our fellow men and women and our children and grandchildren – who deserve to know the truth.