



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A**

### ***Liar Liar***

*Readings: Jeremiah 20: 7-9, Ps 62, Romans 12: 1-2, Matthew 16: 21-27*

When a witness is going to give evidence in a court of law, he is obliged to swear or affirm that he will ‘tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.’ This, on a moment’s reflection, is a tall order. The whole truth may not be convenient to his amour propre at best or at worst to his safety and freedom. At a more trivial level he may be tempted to embellish or manicure the facts to reflect more favourably. He needs be wary of unconscious spin. The cost of the unvarnished truth can be very high.

If you want to see that played out in an entertaining way and are a fan of gross comedy and terrific overacting, may I commend to you the Jim Carrey comedy, ‘Liar, Liar.’ Carrey, with his extraordinary facial gymnastics and gift for slapstick, is a charming, deceitful, commercially successful, domestically disastrous, executive whose grip on veracity is at best fragile. Suddenly, it’s a long story, he is cursed with the inability to lie. Worse still, whenever he opens his mouth, he tells the whole truth. It is at once disastrous, hilarious and, in the end, painfully redemptive. The expressions on Carrey’s tortured face as he feels the inevitability of some hugely inconvenient truth escaping from his lips are the stuff of comic dreams. He gurns and contorts as his whole body shudders with the vain effort to suppress the next verbal bombshell.

Anyhow this is not Film Review but I share it with you because, at the light hearted end of the spectrum it is precisely what Jeremiah the prophet is going through in today's Old Testament reading. He rails against God because, he feels, God has led him up the garden path, the actual word is strong – it is 'seduced'. He has been fooled, trapped, misled. He has to tell the truth and the reward is that everybody hates him. He explains that, even when he does his utmost to stop telling the truth, it just bursts out of him. He is Jim Carrey but in agony at the terrible things he must tell his people.

Jeremiah's message is grim indeed. He has been tasked by the Lord to warn his people that they are doomed because of their sinful turning away from God. Their only hope of survival is repentance and return and.....surrender to the brutal marauding armies of the northern empire. They are not to make alliance with Egypt for Egypt will not save them. It is, to put it mildly, a message that is most unwelcome and unacceptable. It leaves Jeremiah looking like a traitor and he successively beaten, derided, imprisoned, cast down a well and barely escapes with his life. His complaint against God is that God has burdened him with this terrible and deeply unpalatable news yet done nothing to save him from the consequences of telling the truth nor verified that truth by action.

The cost and consequence of truth are indeed terrible.

Jeremiah, of course, is a prophet, a proclaimer of the Word of God – that same Word which we will witness later en fleshed in Christ Jesus Our Lord. As the TRUTH itself, Jesus will be resented, persecuted and rejected. This is the same truth that the Church proclaims to the world. We should, therefore, not be surprised if the world finds it uncomfortable and resents

the divine admonishment.

But that admonishment is not an expression of dislike or contempt or hatred but rather an act of love from God and from His messengers. God wants, we want as His disciples, that men turn and be saved, not that they be captured by the enemy, enslaved, exiled and destroyed.

That compulsion to tell the truth is terrifying. We want to be polite, well thought of, reasonable, in tune with our society and its norms where possible. But the Word of God leaves us no such luxury, no such convenient hiding place. If we really care about our fellow men, under siege from the enemy, in an imploding and Godless society, then we not only have a duty to speak the saving truth, but an irrepressible compulsion so to do.

If, imagine for a moment, you were on a clifftop and saw an unattended toddler heading rapidly and ignorantly for the edge, would you wait, stay silent, look around to see if someone else was going to respond. I suggest and indeed hope that you would not. Rather, with every fibre of your being, you would scream alarm and hurtle to pull the little one back from the brink of destruction and final loss.

That is Jeremiah's burden and thankless ministry in a collapsing society. It may well turn out to be ours too. The call to repentance, return, reconciliation and restoration is ancient and ever new and it is fuelled, not by bitterness or despair but by the passionate love that seeks salvation for the witless wanderers from the Way, the foolish, the ignorant and the lost. Many of us have been there and the least we can do is to help others find the way home.