



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Tell the truth – Shame the Devil

Readings: Ezekiel 33: 7-9, s 94, Romans 13: 8-10, Matthew 18: 15-20

I was recently in conversation with a friend in the legal profession and we were discussing literature. At his enquiry I vouchsafed that my favourite Dickens was 'Bleak House'. This was dangerous ground as those of you who are familiar with the great work will know. It is a consummate and terrifying critique of the legal profession and the infinite and ruinous complexities of the Law for any who get entramelled in its merciless clutches. Dickens wrote from experience, having seen his own family incarcerated in the hopelessness of a debtors' prison. There was a momentary pause while my friend took it on the chin before replying, 'Oh it's much worse now!'

It was a given of the early Christian community that it would be an utter disgrace to have to take a fellow believer to court. Christians ought to be able to sort out their differences within the community of Faith rather than endure the humiliation of submitting their unreconciled differences to the judgement of a pagan court.

So today's Gospel reminds us that there are procedures for resolution within the fellowship of the Faith.

Jesus tells us that if our brother has offended or wounded or otherwise trespassed us then the first thing to do is to tell him. 'Have it out with him',

Jesus says. See if he recognises the effect of his action, owns it, offers to apologise and put it right. This is, so far, a private matter. It requires no public trumpeting. It is an opportunity for reconciliation on a one to one basis.

The other important thing is to remember that the Christian community is first and foremost a penitent community and one that is centred on the forgiveness of sins. We are not a grievance culture as so many are today. We do not seek to be offended and we know that to hold a grudge simply festers in the soul and does no good to the festerer. So we speak our complaint to our brother.

If he accepts this and makes apology and restoration, where that is possible or appropriate, we have won our brother back at minimum cost and embarrassment. After all we owe it to one another to speak the truth.

If, on the other hand our brother rejects our case then we should bring two or three witnesses to affirm the facts. If we cannot assemble such witnesses then the case falls. If, however, in the light of corroborative evidence and witness, our brother acknowledges the truth of his predicament, then again he may be restored to us. Very often we require independent witnesses to give a true view of what has happened.

If our brother rejects the witness of the representatives of the community then he excommunicates himself. He rejects the judgement of the community and thereby exiles himself from the community. Instead of submitting to the Law of Love and Divine Mercy, the fool turns to Law to resolve his folly. How much easier it is, as we constantly teach our children I hope, to simply say 'SORRY' at the outset and get it done with.

The Gospels are full of cautionary tales about the terrible price of impenitence and unforgiveness. We have a duty to our fellow man to

correct error and to be corrected, where necessary, ourselves. To reject that truth is to pave the way to a ruinous encounter with the Law and to diminish all hope of reconciliation and restoration.

The Prophet Ezekiel warns us that silence is not an option. If we do not speak in loving correction to our fellow man then, when he goes to the judgement, not only will he suffer for his impenitence but we will be held to account for his blood - because we did not do our job.

We do not sound off out of a sense of self - righteousness but out of a deep concern for the harmony of the kingdom, the care of our fellow man and the health of our own immortal soul.

An impenitent community that preaches repentance is utterly implausible.

A kingdom that professes mutual forgiveness but instead practises the holding of grudges is incredible.

The Gospel depends for its propagation and acceptance by the world on the coherence of doctrine, faith and practice amongst the faithful.

Be honest. Be fair. Seek the best for your fellow man – even when he has wronged you. ‘Tell the truth and shame the Devil’, as my Grandma used to say. Or as the Nobel Prize poet Bob Dylan wrote, ‘To live outside the Law you must be honest’. Otherwise it’s a very bleak house indeed.

Today, we have the joy of celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation with two of our men, Ikar and Chris. Their witness in coming forward to affirm their faith is encouraging to us all and a reminder of our own journeys.

These two men seek the strengthening of the grace of the Holy Spirit and those gifts of wisdom and faithfulness that will keep them true disciples of the Lord. Chris is here via the sacrament of marriage and the ministry of Fr Ciaran. Ikar was the long serving little boy from the altar at Padstow with

the big eyes, cheeky smile and ever changing hair colour, now a man, still serving and fully fledged in the Faith.

We welcome you both with great joy.