HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

A Good Wife?
Readings: Proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31, Ps 127, 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-6, Matthew 25: 14-30

A perfect wife, who can find?'

There is a short answer to that question.

It is a problem of the modern translation. Modern translations normally dilute strong language and replace it with words with all the impact of a wet flannel. This version does two things. First, it posits the impossible and then, courtesy of the compilers of the lectionary - a crew noted for cobbling together unrelated texts and then leaving out the best bits of them anyway – exaggerates to the point of impossibility and then…….leaves out the best bits anyway.

Rant over.

The text reads in the older translations – 'A Good Wife' – nobody's perfect. The present edit has this poor woman praised for her works, which seem to consist of knitting into the small hours, doing her husband no harm and charitable giving. This you might expect from a deeply repressive patriarchal society and the lectionary editors do not disappoint your prejudice.

However, this is a very warped and diminished picture of the woman as wife and mother. The bits they have cut out include, inter alia,

She is in complete managerial control of her household. She is fit and strong.
She is a trader in goods. She is an entrepreneur. She invests in land.
She plants vineyards. She is wise and kind.
Her children call her blessed. Her husband is full of praise.
This is a bit more exciting than the editor's mousey little thing up all night crocheting a blanket. This is a real woman fulfilling her vocation in both family and community. A good wife indeed.
In Judaism, a religion centred in the home, she is the high priest.
Indeed, the Judeo-Christian patriarchy, sneered at and derided by political feminism, seems to bear little relation to the caricature Aunt Sally version touted about for much of my lifetime.
The problem for us Western Christians, at the start of the third millennium, is not finding a good wife but rather finding a good husband and this is not unrelated.
Pastorally, over the last forty odd years, I have found, again and again, gifted and talented and attractive women longing to be married but finding no man to husband them. That is not to say that have not found a male (horrid word) 'partner' – reduces the sacred relationship to a third-rate business arrangement – but they have not found a husband.
The likely 'men' are instead not men but boys. They have discovered, in the convenient light of modern sexual politics, that they need never grow up or take responsibility or become husbands and fathers. The culture and its false prophets have enabled young men to have a roof over their heads, free meals and regular sex without the need of commitment or maturity. What's not to like for the infantilised male and his simple untutored biology? Thus, they drift into middle age never going deep and day by day stealing their woman's fertility and hopes of motherhood.

One of my favourite bits of evangelical outreach is at weddings. Getting in conversation with ’30-something’ couples over a beer, I will casually enquire how long they have been together. The man, generally, will offer the reply - ‘five/six/seven years’ – whatever and seemingly proud of it.

I then reply, ‘So why don’t you marry the girl?’ The response is electric.

The girl’s eyes light up like a full beam Ferrari.

The man/boy looks simultaneously as if his blood had been drained and he had been clattered by a baseball bat.

Belatedly recovering we get the litany of excuses –

Not ready……. In that case stop wasting her time

Can’t afford it ……can’t afford not to. A wedding is a day, a marriage is a life

We’ve talked about it…….well get on with it . Life is not a rehearsal.

Most of all you will only begin to go deep into that glorious adventure into God’s love and into the beautiful wonder of the beloved on the other side of the sacramental commitment, promise and blessing. Everything else is just ‘playing house’.

The prevailing philosophy of the age has been no friend to our womenfolk and no encourager of mature masculinity. It has, by lying about the nature of our humanity, proved an insidious enemy of the family and a destroyer of society. We need to combat it at every opportunity.

A good wife, who can find? There are potentially plenty out there.

A good husband, who can find? Time for the boys to become men.

Properly and joyfully undertaken there is no greater or more exciting adventure in love than marriage and family for it is the giving of our whole selves to God and to the one we love and to the little ones who will come and open that secret door in our hearts that nothing can ever close.