



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

Blessed is the man whose unrighteousness is forgiven

Readings: Leviticus 13: 1-2, Ps 31, 1 Corinthians 10: 31-11:1, Mark 1: 40-45

‘Blessed is the man whose unrighteousness is forgiven, whose sin is remitted’

You don’t hear much about sin these days. Its unfashionable and rather quaint terminology doesn’t ring bells in the modern mind. This is, perhaps, unsurprising as sin was effectively abolished, as I recall, in about 1962. We were who we were by dint of genetic predisposition, environmental pressures and cultural influence. With all this going down, a chap can scarcely be blamed for his less acceptable behaviour. Like the early phrenologists who boldly predicted that you could tell a man’s character by the shape of his head or the eugenicists who could spot a sub-human by facial characteristics, we had come to believe that no-one was truly responsible for their actions. If Hitler had enjoyed a better relationship with his mother then history would have been a lot easier for the Jews, no doubt. As the great American humorist, Garrison Keillor observes by giving his fictional hometown the motto - ‘Sumus quod Sumus’ – we are what we are. Any reason to feel guilt or shame was duly defenestrated – it went out of the window. Your truth

and my truth might be incompatible but we could at least agree to differ and affect an indifference to the consequences of what used to be called 'SIN'. Indeed some sin was rebranded as something to be proud of and that pride, once condemned, flagged up under a hijacked rainbow banner- once the Biblical byword for the new start after the judgement of sinful Man.

Part of this paradigm shift in the understanding of Sin was indeed cultural – the rejection of objective truth in the pursuit of relativism. Part of it was pseudo-scientific as a nod to Darwinian Determinism – the flipside of wretched Calvinism's hopeless predestination and moral depravity. Sumus quod Sumus.

The Church was not immune. Confession, once a regular weekly practice, suddenly found itself marginalised, rare and the haunt of the scrupulous. The anonymity of the 'BOX' and the stark simplicity of kneeling before the mercy seat was replaced by the easy chair and the confidential chat in response to the popularity of psychotherapy and modern man's endless desire to talk about himself.

Sixty years on we know there is a problem. The confessional boxes are emptier than the churches. Many Catholics – though it remains a rule that to qualify you must make confession at least once a year – haven't been to confession for years. This is both tragic and astonishing.

Tragic on two levels – first because they are missing out on one of the greatest gifts of God. Second because, in thus absenting themselves, they are rejecting the whole purpose of the Cross. Jesus, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity incarnate, did not die on the Cross so that we might be nice or kind or do our bit for CAFOD – but -SO THAT

OUR SINS MAY BE FORGIVEN. That we may be reconciled with God. That we may be purified and driven forward on the pilgrimage to holiness, a journey that we will complete in the Purgatory and be made ready for Heaven.

Today's Psalm reminds us of just what we are missing out on if we are not regular in confession and well prepared. The Psalmist tells us that, if our sin is forgiven we are truly blessed. He notes that, when we rid ourselves of guile and evasion and circumlocution and pretence about who we are, then we are truly blessed. He reminds us of the cost of not confessing – 'While I held my tongue' – bottled it up – the very fabric of my being wasted away. God's hand is heavy on me – my very moisture is like a drought in the summer. I am spiritually dried up, crippled, burdened.

Sin is like a sack of ordure/dung which we carry around on our backs, constantly adding to it. We get used to the weight, immune to the stink and unwilling to put it down yet moving ever more slowly and heavy laden. On the whole, being similarly burdened, our friends and acquaintances are too polite to mention the consequent impairment and general unpleasantness.

There is no need to travel the pilgrim way, weighed down with this offensive burden of offences and larded with our own mess. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is truly that and more. It is the very Sacrament of Liberation where, unburdened at the foot of the Cross of the One who died for our sins, we may walk away free men and women, cleansed, relieved, joyful, walking on air, alert to the possibility of holiness and the longed for closeness to God. Thus we can approach the

Altar of the Sacrifice and receive Him with clean hands, a tongue that has confessed Him, a head that has bowed before His throne in the company of a fellow sinner, the priest, and a heart that has been rekindled and ablaze with the fire of love.

Thus, the Psalmist tells us, from his own experience, the righteous and the true of heart rejoice in the Lord and MERCY, the great power of God's love, embraces us on every side.

Who, in their right mind, would not want that?

If you have forgotten how to make confession or want some help with the best way of preparing – very important – then please ask. I would be delighted.