



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

7th Sunday of Easter – Year B

Drawing the short straw

Readings: Acts 1: 15-26, Ps 103, 1 John 4: 11-16, John 17:11b-19

“And the lot fell to Matthias.” Acts 1: 15-26

Many years ago, when I was at an Anglican Synod meeting, a young vicar was giving a sycophantic speech, a sort of shoe-cleaning exercise to the Establishment. The elderly clergyman sitting next to me whispered, ‘There is nothing quite so revolting as the sight of naked ambition in a young clergyman’. Amen.

There is always a disproportionate and unhealthy interest in the matter of preferment to senior office in the Church. In the Anglican Church there is a system and procedure of consultation, diocesan input, the secret lists of Archbishop’s and Prime Minister’s Appointment Secretaries all designed to give the illusion of serious consideration and engagement with the grass roots needs.

In the Catholic Church there is the secretive consultation, letters sent to various people in the diocese, sworn to silence, all collated and sent to Rome for approval of the nominee sorted by the Nuncio. The Pope, when he has got a moment, signs off on the name unless anything untoward has arisen

meantime. In the seminaries of both there are young men who arrive with a pair of purple socks in their bottom drawer – just in case.

Choosing, selecting, is important and today we read of the Apostles way of choosing a successor to Judas Iscariot so that the number twelve, representing the Tribes of Israel, may be maintained.

The criterion is simple. The candidates must have been with the band of disciples and Jesus from the get-go and be witnesses to everything from Jesus' baptism to His Resurrection. No 'Johnny come lately's' here.

There are two considerable candidates – no secret lists or untraceable correspondence. The Apostles pray and then lots are drawn. Some have argued that this is a similar method to the voting at a Conclave. But the Orthodox Church, for example, still takes 'lots' seriously. So it was that, after the War the two candidates for Archbishop of one autocephalous church, one a war hero and the other a relative nonentity, were separated by the drawing of lots. The war hero lost. The Church accepted the, humanly speaking, bizarre decision.

I have always felt a bit sorry for Joseph Justus Barsabbas – to lose out in such a way but who is to say that the church arrived at its decision unworthily? Is the prayerful drawing of lots any worse an indicator of God's will than a full HR interview process and human decision?

The matter of choosing is always contentious.

In the sanctuary of my old theological college in Cambridge is an ikon of Christ. On the open book of the Scripture portrayed there is written the important reminder from John's Gospel:

'You did not choose me. No. I chose you.'

That is the heart of the matter. Christ does the team selection. And, mercifully for us, it is not on merit.

St

Paul is very good on this subject. He reminds the Church at Corinth of their lack of credentials. He says to them, '*When you were called to be church*' – for the word 'ekklesia' means just that, the ones who are called. '*When you were called – not many of you were clever. Not many of you were from the top drawer. Not many were people of rank or influence.*' St Paul tells them straight that God chose them, the fools, in order to shame the wise. He chose them, weaklings, to confound the strong. St Paul includes his own inadequacies too. He did not preach high philosophy but simply Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1Cor 1 v 26 – 2 v 1 – end)