



## **21st Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C: The Disciplined**

**A Homily by Fr Robbie Low**

***Readings: Isaiah 66: 18-21, Ps 116, Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13, Luke 13: 22-30***

It was in the very dawn of the 1960s, that revolutionary decade that was to change everything beyond recognition and, apparently, beyond recall, that I entered senior school. The subject of 'corporal punishment' , formerly a universally accepted last resort punishment of most schools, was beginning to appear on the agenda of the more enthusiastic reformers. Truth to tell I had never known anyone 'beaten' at my wonderful junior school and there were very few takers of this particular option at my new senior school. I realise this was different for those benefiting from the ministrations of the inappropriately named 'Christian Brothers' who clearly believed that they could mysteriously thrash boys into Heaven.

At my school there was one notable exception – Tubby Tasker – a young Maths teacher and Scout master whose ritual arrival in every classroom

was to remove a slipper from the briefcase and place it ceremoniously on his desk. Those who failed to achieve the required mark in the forthcoming test would be invited to step forward and bend over while he used the board rubber to chalk our behinds. Then he would, glint in his eye, proceed to 'clean' our trousers with his springy plimsoll.

I would like to say that it made me the man I am today and, insofar as I have a lifelong aversion to Mathematics and a deep suspicion of uniformed organisations, I suppose that is true.

The other end of the spectrum was Jim, a huge former British Lion, who took on the fifth form failures, had them arrive an hour early every day to study Shakespeare, would clout them round the head for idleness or inattention -and got them all good passes and two of his 'fabulous failures' into Cambridge.

In retrospect, one was driven by some perverse desire for personal gratification in ritualised beating, the other by a genuine passion to see his boys triumph and the spontaneous administration of some manly encouragement. In the end both would nowadays have been banned and probably put on a register somewhere.

What followed in the retreat from such discipline, bad and good, was a growing anti-nomianism or lawlessness where, ad absurdum, parents not only abandoned any physical chastisement but catechised each other in the mantra that even 'saying no' to a child would somehow hinder its development. Explain and resolve. Good advice BUT -Explaining to a child a thousand times why he must not do something is a waste of energy. After the first few times he's got the message and he knows you have no more sanctions and nor, God help them, does the school and his unfortunate teachers.

I remember sitting in the lounge of a very senior military commander in my last parish as his son, aged three, ran all over the sofa, chairs, window sills, us, shouting, the poor wife in hot pursuit, while the commander of men completely ignored the mayhem destroying our planned conversation. My fingers itched.

Why do I bore you with these elderly, nostalgic ruminations?

Well, a couple of weeks ago Fr Placidus, you will recall, preached on that text where Jesus tells the story of the returning Master beating his lazy, disobedient, bullying and unprepared servants. Now today we are reading in Hebrews about this same Lord who disciplines his children, punishes, trains. I am not sure, in the light of modern thinking, that this God would get the necessary DBS to be in charge of any Church today.

Let's briefly consider the options here.

God, the writer tells us, first encourages His children.

That is the vital context.

We are not to be put off by His rebuke when we err. Only an indifferent parent would let their child go uncorrected

He only disciplines us because He loves us. The Father wants the very best for His children. The word translated as 'discipline' from the Greek is the equivalent of the phrase, 'bringing up our children'. And after all, those who are 'discipuli', those wanting to be followers of Christ are necessarily 'discipled' or 'disciplined'.

It is true that we do not either like or enjoy the punishments which accompany this process of becoming faithful servants and soldiers of Christ but they are a vital part of God's parenting and our maturing in the Faith.

If we love our children then we will have times when we chastise them.  
Love is never about sentimentality but about sacrifice.  
It is about being real.

The chastisement is not for the personal gratification of wielding power  
but for the immediate resolution of conflict and ignorance and the  
education of the soul.

You could say that God is a 'JIM' person and definitely not a Derek.

He does not lie in wait eager to punish our failures but rather is  
passionate for us to succeed and get to the spiritual Cambridge –  
Heaven. We are His children and he loves us and wants the best for us.  
We will not do that without being the disciples, the disciplined.