



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

30th Sunday Year C

Lord, have mercy

Readings: Ecclesiasticus 35: 12-14, 16-19; Ps 32, 2 Timothy 4: 4-8, 16-18, Luke 18: 9-14

I want you to imagine that we are standing in an Eastern Orthodox church, before the ikonostasis where the Annunciation indicates the gateway to heaven and the great figures of Christ, His blessed Mother and all the saints lead on to glory.

Above us the hanging lamps twinkle like stars in the firmament. The air is filled with the swirling smoke of Frankincense and the deep bass voices of the priest and choir. Again and again we will hear the repeated phrase of the Slavonic Liturgy: '*Gospodi pomiluj*' (pronounced pommy loy).

It means simply, 'Lord have mercy'.

In western liturgy the use of the Kyries, Lord have mercy , are restricted to the opening of the Liturgy, to the penitential rite. In the East the petition rolls on throughout the worship. There is a reason for this.

In the West we associate mercy primarily with forgiveness, with reconciliation, with the removal of the threat of punishment and that is not wrong. It is, after all, why Christ died for us.

But in the East it has a broader implication. It is not simply that Orthodox like grovelling to God a bit longer than impenitent Westerners, it is that the concept of mercy is much wider. God's mercy is not just in His forgiving our sins by the Blood of Christ Jesus His Son but about the merciful bounty He longs to pour on His redeemed sons and daughters. In that sense all the prayers of our life are infused with the purple thread of this petition:

Lord have mercy, Kyrie Eleison, Gospodi pomiluj.

When we were privileged to be in Rome last month the daily papers were awash with the Pope Francis' latest interview. The headlines were along the lines of 'Divorce, Abortion, Homosexuality – Pope takes new line.'

Of course by the second paragraph the story had to admit that what the Holy Father had said was that he was a loyal son of the Church and that the teaching of the Church was in the Catechism and people knew what the Church taught.

What he added was that it was not always helpful to bang people over the head with it in a condemnatory fashion. The Church, he explained, was a 'field hospital'. You have a 'field hospital' in the midst of a war zone or a disaster area. You are ministering to the wounded in the long culture wars of our generation.

All they need to know initially is that there is a place of refuge, a place of healing, a place where the pain can be eased and conquered, a place where they will be unconditionally welcomed and loved. They need to know that Church is truly the home to which they can return and never be turned away. The Church is the place where the abundant and eternal mercy of God can be

encountered and where the broken can be mended and deep wounds of life healed.

In short our Holy Father has asked us to preach and live the Gospel.

LORD HAVE MERCY is not just a necessary penitential response to our follies and self inflicted wounds of sin but also a heart cry for the fullness of God's love to restore us to the people He created and intended us to be.

LORD HAVE MERCY in all its fullness.

Today's Gospel hinges upon this ancient prayer.

Jesus contrasts the odious self-righteous of the self consciously religious Pharisee with the simple unadorned prayer of the grateful sinner. There is no question in Our Lord's mind, and He should know, which prayer will be heard by God.

When the war weary of the battlefield come within our orbit they usually expect to encounter, rightly or wrongly, the Pharisee. They think that we will be sitting in judgement on their failings, disasters, wrong choices, wounded hearts.

They need to know that the truth is that we are simply sinners ourselves who have cast ourselves utterly on the mercy of God and now live in the mysterious joy of His love. They are our brothers and sisters and what we have received is offered freely and gloriously to them.

We are not the finished product. By His mercy the Lord is healing us still, making us strong at the broken places.

Non-believers sometimes tell me that the Church is full of hypocrites and I readily agree with them. I am one of them. I have the highest standards and I fail regularly to live up to them. That is why I accept that I am a sinner and depend absolutely on God's mercy. So, yes, the Church is full of hypocrites but I add that 'there is always room for one more'.

Mercy is the welcome home.

Kyrie Eleison, Gospodi Pomiluj, Lord Have Mercy.

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