



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

### ***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body***

*Readings: Jeremiah 20:10-13, Ps 68, Romans 5:12-15, Matthew 10:26-33*

The late Archbishop of Chicago, Francis George once said to a group of his priests: 'I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square.'

Secretly recorded on someone's phone, the quote went viral. Cardinal George confirmed that this was exactly what he had said. The way things were going that was his expectation. Martyrdom had never been off the menu but now it was heading West. The important thing is to be faithful. He echoes the Master.

Jesus said: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in Hell.'

Today's lection from the Old Testament and the Gospel testify to the cost of fidelity to God. In the prophet Jeremiah we see a society on the brink of collapse, invasion by alien forces and imminent ruin. The prophet understands that this is the reality but, to the community in which he

ministers, his words, God's Words, are unwelcome and an assault on the fabric of the state. Pointing out that turning away from God will inevitably see the implosion and destruction of that kingdom is a timelessly unpopular message. For his faithfulness to God Jeremiah will endure prison, torture and, ultimately, martyrdom. We are not here for applause but to lead people to salvation.

In the Gospel today Jesus prepares his disciples, his followers, not only for His own martyrdom, but for the three centuries of heroic suffering that will accompany the foundation and mission of the early church.

If all this seems a long way away and a long time ago it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that the last half century in which we have lived has outstripped all previous figures for Christian martyrdom.

Martyrdom, for a Christian, is to witness to Jesus. If that leads to punishment and death, so be it. It is not to be confused with the warped and vicious mentality that leads a man to slaughter the innocent in a fit of rage while claiming the authority of God to justify it. Those who die with such darkness in their hearts and such blasphemy on their lips will find themselves in Hell – and it is about time some religious leaders warned them of their terrible destiny.

It is, of course, a relief to us that we are, not yet at least, among those called to suffer anything more than scorning amusement from our enemies, philosophical pity from our non-believing friends and contempt from our secular authorities. But, slowly slowly, brothers and sisters the

screw is turning, the ratchet tightening. A straw in the wind.....About ten years ago Catholics decided to have a Blessed Sacrament procession in Truro on Corpus Christi Sunday. The procession had to come off the streets because of health and safety requirements and street marshals. Shortly thereafter the 'Gay Pride' march began its annual visit to the streets of the county town. While the Catholic witness has been curtailed, the 'Gay Pride' march will celebrate its tenth year with regular and generous financial support from both the City and County Councils. It is labelled as one of the four key 'family' events in the county and its rainbow flag flies over County Hall alongside that of St. Piran on the parade day.

Another straw.....a fortnight ago, when the country decided it didn't want a government, negotiations began between the Conservatives and the Democratic Unionist Party. Outrage from the libertarians in the Tory party, criticism from its lesbian Scottish leader. From the BBC..... a reporter described the danger to the Tory party thus: 'The social conservatism of the DUP would contaminate the government'.

The 'contamination' – the word means 'polluting' or 'poisoning' – of which the BBC reporter speaks is the DUP's belief in marriage being between a man and a woman and their support of the sanctity of life and consequent opposition to abortion. As an Irish Catholic Republican friend of mine remarked recently, 'It has come to something when those we were brought up to hate are the only politicians now espousing Catholic Christian values.'

Last week the leader of the Liberal Democrats resigned because he said it was now impossible for a Christian to lead a progressive liberal party. Gladstone must be turning in his grave. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine any party being led by a traditional believing Christian, such is the pernicious power of the lobby groups.

The Christian world in which many of us grew up has been abolished. We need not look for sympathy from the power structures of government or media. What we must do is listen to Jesus. He tells us not to be afraid. Every hair of our head is numbered and we are precious to God. If we witness to the Jesus, He will acknowledge us before the Father. If we deny Jesus and the teachings of the Faith, He will deny us. Nothing could be more terrifying than to separate ourselves from God by denying the Faith. Which leaves us still with the age old task of the Church. We are here to speak the truth, however inconvenient. We are here to proclaim God's Word, Jesus. We are here to call all men to repentance and to turn back to God. We are here to warn of the ruin that lies ahead for a people who have turned away from the source of life. But we are also here to prepare the future beyond that catastrophe too.

To return to Cardinal Francis George.....

He was quite content that he should be quoted thus but insisted that all who quote him finish what he actually said. This is it.

"I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has

done so often in human history."

We serve the Lord of history, past, present and to come. If the call to repentance is not heeded we must still, beyond our own martyrdom, prepare the generations yet to come, beyond the new dark ages, to rebuild Christendom.

Do not be afraid. Let us continue to witness to Jesus Christ both for love of Him and love of fallen Man. The first law of the Church is the salvation of souls.

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