



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Sour grape

Readings: Isaiah 5: 1-7, Ps 80. Philippians 4: 6-9, Matthew 21: 33-43

Just over a week ago I was sitting at a table at Corsi's wine bar on the Via del Gesu just down from Santa Maria Sopra Minerva and the Pantheon. Very helpfully Corsi's does a special Friday fish night for those who keep the penitential disciplines of the Church. In consequence I found myself staring down at a plate of Langoustines, Lobster and Sea Bream on a bed of samphire and grilled vegetables. Some places are better to do your penance in than others.

On the next table was a solitary middle aged male diner enduring a similar penance. We got into conversation. He was in Rome for a couple of weeks. He was an historian. My interest was immediately aroused. What period? Twentieth century. What subject? European Integration. I confessed my Britishness and that we were now studying European dis-integration. What followed was a fascinating half hour from this passionate Dane on the folly of Britain, our inevitable poverty, our failure to understand EU virtues. It was all delivered in a charming and thoughtful way. We covered everything from the Zollverein 19th cartel that created an united Germany to the expansion of that idea to an united federal Europe. We covered the democratic deficit inherent in such a system – a compromise worth the

cost. We broached the inevitable yearly audit failures of the European budget – the result of investment on which the jury was still out. We looked at immigration – the disastrous demography of native European birth-rate ensuring that e.g. Germany alone would need to import c.15million new workers to sustain itself economically over the next twenty years – the cultural problems, the widespread failure to integrate whole communities – the fact that Europe would no longer be recognisably European by 2050. It is a subject on which it is all too rare to have an intelligent, informed and courteous conversation. What, of course, bothers me about Europe and, most particularly Great Britain, is not whether we are in or out – though I have a longstanding view – but what we are to make of the lot of our nation and our continent (to which we will always belong) in the light of today's Gospel.

Jesus picks up on theme of the Lord's vineyard, so painfully laid out in the Prophet Isaiah. After everything that the Lord has done for Judah it produces no worthwhile harvest – only sour grapes. Like the modern prosperous society the enjoyment of plenty does not raise up thankful hearts but rather it breeds the spirit of complaint and resentment.

Those who are listening to Jesus, as he picks up this theme, will remember that the disobedient and unfruitful kingdom, to which Isaiah preached, eventually fell to the great powers of the Near East, the land was wasted, the great places of worship were destroyed and the people driven into exile. The prophet himself was martyred. It was not something that Jesus' contemporaries wished to recall – never mind be equated with. It had taken them nearly five centuries to recover to the present position of puppet kingdom, new Temple and toleration. Now here is Jesus accusing them of

refusing to acknowledge their debt to God, rejecting those who speak His Word and planning to kill the son and heir so that they can inherit everything. It's a big call. But, as we now know....

Within two years of this prophecy, the Son and heir will have been judicially murdered by the religious authorities and secular powers - Christ crucified. Within forty years the little kingdom will have been destroyed in rebellion and suppression. Its people will have begun the longest exile in the history of Man.

What's this got to do with Europe or Great Britain. Well this is a land and a continent that has produced an amazing civilisation in terms of wealth, culture, justice, political system. Our generation has enjoyed a peace and prosperity unequalled. The very foundation stone of all this has been our Judeo-Christian roots. Yet, in the last fifty years, Europe has abandoned Christ – nowhere more so than in these islands where we have recorded the fastest decline in Christian belief and practice. There was no room for even a nod at the foundational reality of the Faith in the Constitution of the EU (over which its citizens had no say). Successive governments in this country have tried to outdo one another in passing legislation radically opposed to the will of God and Christian teaching.

We have outgrown God and his old fashioned ways. We can, apparently, manage under our own steam and much better without these silly superstitious myths. That seems to be the common line among the modernists, post-modernists and deconstructionists who dominate the political, philosophical and moral landscape as they continue their relentless assault on the Faith, the integrity of the person and the life of the family.

These are the relativists, the enemies of truth, the philosophers of ruin, we have been warned against by every prophetic Pope from St. Pius X to Pope Benedict XVI.

The fruits of Christian culture spring from the Christian Faith.

You cannot have human rights in a system that denies the fundamental right to life for its most vulnerable because it is in thrall to militant secular materialism. You cannot guarantee liberal democracy in a system geared to interest groups and their lobbyists, where the people are not consulted in case they give the wrong answer.

You cannot sustain society on the bedrock of family life where the culture of the state militates against having children in the first place.

The demography of Europe is a disaster.

It will not end well. It cannot end well.

In a culture dominated by contraception, abortion and the glorification of aberrant sex, only the new arrivals are having children in any number.

But you can rest assured that we will not be thanked for saying any of this.

As a nation and a continent we have still not learned that the appeasement of wickedness always has diabolical consequences.

We return to the prophet, Isaiah, and to Jesus. There are two simultaneous tasks for the Church of our lifetime to perform. First, for love of our people, we must continue to warn, to call to repentance, to speak out for righteousness. We must preach the Gospel that almost three generations of our people have forgotten or never truly heard. That is the urgent task for

every one of us. Be informed. Tell your friends. Encourage your priests. Write to your M.P. Write to the BBC – we pay their salaries. Witness to Jesus.

Second.....in the event that our country and our continent continue to ignore the Word of God in Jesus and seek to crucify His Body, the Church.....we must prepare our communities of Faith for a new Dark Age and make sure the fountainheads of our Faith are strong, endowed and secure against the days to come.

Today's Gospel does not make for comfortable listening -Jesus seldom does – but we ignore it at our peril and the deeper peril of our people and our land.

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