



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-August 19th 2018 – Padstow

Readings: Proverbs 9: 1-6, Psalm 33, Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6: 51-58

‘Wisdom has built her house on seven pillars.’

‘Some Englishmen, of whom Kitchener was chief, believed that a rebellion of Arabs against Turks would enable England, while fighting Germany, simultaneously to defeat Turkey.

Their knowledge of the nature and power and country of the Arabic-speaking peoples made them think that the issue of such a rebellion would be happy: and indicated its character and method.

So they allowed it to begin...’

Thus the introduction of the account, by T.E. Lawrence, of the Arab Revolt in 1916- 18 and a reminder that European tinkering in the Middle East is nothing new. The events were cinematically immortalised by Peter O’Toole as Lawrence of Arabia and the great work itself rejoices in the title of ‘The Seven Pillars of Wisdom’.

Lawrence had already reserved that title for an academic magnum opus on the seven great cities of the Orient. Scrapping his work on that he transferred the title to his new work – an account which had to be completely rewritten after he lost his original manuscript while changing trains at Reading station.

The title, as we see, comes from the Book of the Proverbs and the Church, in her wisdom, links it with the great passage on the Mass in today's Gospel.

We see Wisdom building a house on seven pillars but we are not told what these are. As theologians in the Judeo-Christian tradition we know that seven is the number of completeness in the divine plan, thus the structure is finished. We know also that the Divine Wisdom, the Hagia Sophia (to which Justinian's great church in Constantinople is dedicated), is the essence of God revealed to Man.

This is the first Scriptural clue to the identity of this Wisdom.

The second clue comes in the Letter of James (Ch.3)

James writes that:

1)'The Wisdom from above is pure'. The word 'agne' means pure or holy. These are divine attributes.

2)Wisdom is 'eirenic', that is to say a bringer of peace. Peace is only possible to Man in reconciliation with God, with his origin and his end.

3)Wisdom is lenient, forbearing, patient with the folly of Man.

4)Wisdom is in full compliance with the divine will, the Logos, the infinite foundational reason and utterly convicted of truth.

5)Wisdom knows no favourites but is indiscriminate in its loving pursuit of Man

6)Wisdom is full of mercy and the fruits of good works

7)Wisdom has no 'side', is unfeigned and straightforward and sincere.

These are, of course, easily identified as qualities of Christ Jesus Himself and gifts, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, He seeks to pass on to those who seek to follow Him in the pilgrim way. From ancient times Christian tradition has identified Christ Jesus with the divine wisdom.

But there is more yet. Old hands will be recalling another proverb and a line from today's Psalm:

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. How does this tie in? Completely and coherently for the person who does not comprehend the almightiness of God and the dire fate of a soul disconnected from the divine life will scarcely appreciate the urgency of his quest, the extraordinary act of condescension and mercy in God becoming Man in Christ or His sacrifice for us on the Cross. For the man who rejects God 'fear' is rightly of the eternal consequence. For the believer, that 'fear' is not terror but, rather, reverence and awe transforming into knowledge of God and heartfelt love. That 'fear' Proverb completes, 'and the knowledge of God is insight and understanding'.

We are being winched aboard by revelation.

If these are the beginning of the journey and the meaning of the foundational pillars, where can we find the House which Holy Scripture promises. Where does the Holy Wisdom dwell?

The house for the incarnation of the divine is given to us in Our Lady, the Mother of God, the place where, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Son of God was pleased to take on our humanity. Wisdom has built the house. That house, where the Incarnate Wisdom still tabernacles and gives wisdom to the world is the ikon of Our Lady – the Universal Church – obedient to the Word of God, open to the Holy Spirit, seeking to be holy, to bring peace, patient with the folly of Man, utterly convicted of truth, indiscriminate in its loving pursuit of Man, full of Mercy and good works, sincere in its quest for holiness.

And finally.....listen to the invitation.

Wisdom invites all of us, however foolish we may have been, to the banquet: 'To the fool she says, Come and eat my bread, drink the wine I have prepared. Leave your folly and walk in the way of perception. Come

and know the truth.' The sacrifice, Scripture tells us, has been made, the table prepared. It is here.

(Thus the New Testament is hidden in the Old - for Christ is the eternal Word.)

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals Himself as the very sacrifice of the banquet. He invites the world to the feast of the Divine Wisdom, to incorporation into the Divine life. The bread and wine of His Body and Blood are the sacrifice of the unbounded mercy and fruitful work of the Holy Wisdom incarnate in Jesus and re-presented at every Mass on the altars of the Universal Church.

We are the 'fools' who have responded to this amazing invitation into the divine life of forever in the Presence. Let us set out from this House of Wisdom, in the strength of His gifts and supported by the prayers of Our Lady and the teaching of the Church to invite other 'fools' to the banquet of His loving mercy.