



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year B-August 26th 2018- Bodmin

Readings: Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18, Psalm 33, Ephesians 5:21-32, John 6:60-69

‘Be subject to one another in obedience to Christ’. Ephesians 5

It is poor form to speak ill of the dead and, in reality, most of it wasn’t her fault. But the truth is that the short, remarkable and often unhappy life of Princess Diana made significant changes to the liturgical expectations of the nation in their rites of passage and, consequently, to what little remained of their understanding of the Faith.

Her funeral – a bizarre mixture of pop culture, sentimentality and familial score-settling – set the future pattern of Do-It-Yourself funerals – Desert Island Discs meets the Lives of the Saints.

When the state church astonishingly abdicated its sacred duty to preach the Gospel and ceded the pulpit to a grieving relative the eulogy, overnight, became more significant than the sermon.

The point of a funeral – prayers for the soul of the departed – with no sacrifice to offer, was lost in a liberal protestant backwash.

Catholic funerals have not been immune to the deleterious effects of this trend.

The other trend set running by Princess Diana was in the Marriage Service.

For reasons that are now historically evident, Lady Diana Spencer was unwilling to 'obey' her husband. The Archbishop of the time, knowing the score, was in no position to argue the toss and, if he had, his wife – a feisty feminist – would have given him a hard time at home. Lady Diana's decision caught the zeitgeist and brides, who knew little or nothing of the marriage doctrine, would turn up for interview knowing they didn't want 'that old fashioned bit'. For a quiet life most clergy simply rolled over.

The beautiful pastoral office of the Marriage rite was caught in the crossfire of a culture war in which some wanted to eliminate patriarchy from the Church while others, recognising that the Church is irredeemably patriarchal, left to continue the battle elsewhere. The clergy who 'rolled over' missed a wonderful opportunity to explain what this morning's epistle actually means.

It is unarguable that Ephesians says, 'Wives obey your husbands' but to quote that on its own is to miss context and meaning. It is but a part of the instructions to both partners in the deal and it leads out from the opening statement which says this:

'Be subject to one another in obedience to Christ'.

In the cultural context this was little short of revolutionary.

Women were property. Here is the Gospel validating their equality.

There is to be a mutuality of service one to another and all that is in the context of the supreme obedience to Christ. The man is not a law unto himself but a servant of Christ first and second of his wife. The subjection each to the other is a playing out of the service of discipleship – like the Master we come 'not to be served but to serve'.

Anyone who wilfully or foolishly reads the next statement outside this overarching statement of mutual service has missed the point.

The task of the husband is that of Christ for the Church- this is an amazing calling. He is to feed his family, look after it, defend it, nurture its gifts, glorify it by encouraging its holiness. Above all he is to love his wife and family and always seek the best for her and their children.

Hardest of all he is to sacrifice himself for his wife as Christ sacrificed Himself for the Church. Ultimate giving

The obedience called for from a wife is only to be understood in this context. As a husband seeks to perform these tasks of loving service there may be decisions to be made. Only a foolish man does not consult his wife but the buck has to stop somewhere. A husband does not say 'Jump' and expect the only question from his wife to be 'How high?' After all, in marriage, they are one flesh. Husband and wife are different but essential each to the other. Men and women are not interchangeable, as the modernist heresy insists, but they are 'complementary'- needing one another and adding each to each other what the other lacks and longs for for completeness.

It is no accident that St. Paul uses the analogy of marriage to describe Christ's relationship to the Church. The Old Testament is full of texts that see God's relationship with His People as a marital covenant – from the Song of Songs to Hosea. What is quite remarkable, in this passage from Ephesians, is that Paul sees, in faithful, unitive, creative, deeply loving, mutually serving human marriage a reflection of Christ Himself and thus elevates human marriage to a sacrament – a place where, submitted to Jesus and to one another, we may encounter the Presence and know the extraordinary love of God.

It was a revolutionary and transformative teaching in the ancient world.
It remains so today. It offers the highest doctrine of both woman and
man and the greatest promise of the potential of human love.

‘Be servants of one another in obedience to Christ.’

From this command flows all the love and sacrifice and cherishing of
which our little human affection is capable, caught up in Him and
transformed into glory.

