



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-September 2nd 2018- Padstow

***Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1-2 6-8, Psalm 14, James 1:17-18 21-22 27,
Mark 7: 1-8 14-15 21-23.***

‘The people honour me with lip service. Their hearts are far from me.’

Thus Jesus quotes the prophecy of Isaiah to condemn those of His generation who are obsessed with appearance rather than reality.

Cut to today.....It was carnival week in Fowey and on the Wednesday the traders dress up in their shops. I was going to get my hair cut at my usual salon and they always make a big effort in costume. I walked past their window, filled with images of Madonna – not the Blessed Virgin but the self styled ‘Queen of Pop’, pouting and strutting in a series of wardrobe malfunctions that looked like they had been too long in the hotwash .

Inside the two old ladies before me were being tended by the manageress in a copy of Madonna’s famous Jean-Paul Gaultier outfit and her colleague in mercifully less provocative attire. I thought I had come to the wrong place and perhaps, like the old News of the World reporters, I should have ‘made my excuses and left’! When one elderly customer went under the perm drier I took my seat and my regular stylist caught up on family life, town gossip and holidays planned. At this point a granny came in with her six year old granddaughter.

‘Excuse me’, she said, ‘my granddaughter wanted to ask you a question.’

‘Fire away’, said the manageress in her sex goddess outfit. The little girl

said, in breathy excitement, 'Is that Madonna in your window?' 'It is indeed'. There was a pause. Then the little girl said, 'How does she stay so beautiful?' In the momentary silence that followed this profound question I volunteered, 'She has her hair done here every Thursday.' Much laughter, a little more chat and the Madonna fans were on their way. What struck as bizarre was how a well spoken middle class Grandma could be so apparently delighted by her little granddaughter's enthusiasm for such a role model. Here, after all, is a woman whose career has been predicated on sexual outrage, promiscuity, excursions into sado-masochism and bondage, enthusiastic support for abortion, foul mouthed excursions into politics and musings on the overthrow of democracy by terrorism. A hero of modern culture But here we are and we live in strange times.

Fast forward to last weekend. The Holy Father was in Ireland. The weather was foul. The liturgy dire, the music grim, the vestments garish, the turnout thin and the atmosphere gloomy. The BBC had given an extended commentary slot to the usual Church-hating Catholic followed by a discussion on the desperate and deservedly wretched state of the Church in Ireland, Europe, nay, the world.

Pope Francis repeated, at some length and in extraordinary detail, the apology required for the sins of the pervert clergy and the sins of those who had connived at their wickedness. And rightly so. They have destroyed the lives of innocent children. In addition, the wickedness of these (mainly) men has undermined the great work of the Gospel, unjustly cast a shadow over every priest and sapped the confidence and mission of many parishes. The rolling tide of revelations, rehearsed and repeated in reports over years has washed away any recognition of the great works of love and mercy in charity and education over the

millennia and left us as unwitting pariahs in a militantly secular age. We may well be, in the words of one commentator, in 'the worst crisis since the Reformation'. How did we get here? One key factor was the misplaced liberal tolerance of the 1960s onward that allowed sexually disordered men into the seminaries in such numbers that it engendered a culture hostile to the Gospel and many good men, unable to live in such a perverse community, left. We are now reaping the whirlwind of that moral idiocy. That is the bad news.

The Good News is that, out of the dark days of that former age of crisis arose a movement of renewal, revival, learning, flourishing, deeper holiness, more vocations, greater service, greater commitment to the Gospel of the Risen Lord. It was the counter-reformation and its impetus and effect on mission continued virtually until the 1960s.

What do we do now? Back to the BBC for a moment. One of the commentators slagging off the Church was a well known militant atheist. She put her views unchallenged yet the interviewer knew that she was a fanatical supporter of abortion, an enthusiast for euthanasia and an advocate of the tyranny of transgenderism. It would be difficult to think of a greater collection of philosophies that would better categorise child abuse and the assault on the vulnerable. So I am content to apologise for the sins of the Church and do what I can to eliminate the grave errors that fostered this wickedness. But I will take no lectures on abuse from eugenicists and child killers who have the blood of millions on their hands and whose philosophy springs from the ancient enemy of Man. When people say to me, The Catholic Church is guilty of child abuse, I tell them the truth. But I also add that I wish it was unique in this. Wherever power is abused there will be victims.

When they say to me that those who go to Church are hypocrites, I readily agree with them. I have the highest standards and I regularly fail

to live up to them. I am a sinner, like the rest of you, and a hypocrite.

But, I add, there is always room for one more.

The efficacy of the mission has been impaired by this grave scandal but we must not let it rest there. The Truth of the Gospel has not gone away.

The power of Jesus to save is not diminished by our failures or our follies.

Virtue does not cease to be virtue because I regularly fall short of it.

Truth does not cease to be true because I do not fully understand it. The Gospel is no less good news for Man when I am unfaithful to it. Wisdom is no less wisdom because I am a fool. Jesus is no less Lord because I am a sinner.

Of course I want to be a virtuous man, a truth teller, a Gospel disciple and example because then it is easier for others to see and be drawn home to God. We have got a lot of work to do both to cleanse the Church, beginning with ourselves, and overthrow the demonic philosophies of our age. What will be required, as in all crises of the Church's history, is heroic holiness. That means penitential living, deeper learning, thankful generosity, ardent mission and hearts for the mercy of God to Man. All this is rooted in our prayer time and our devotion Christ's sacrifice in the Mass. Nothing less will do. We did not choose the age we live in. All we can do is be the faithful disciples of Jesus who, in the midst of whatever darkness, love and rebuild the Church and, supported by the prayers of the real Madonna and all the saints of God, fulfil her mission for the reconciliation and salvation of Man.