



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2019

***Readings: Jeremiah 1: 4-5 17-19, Psalm 70, 1 Paul 12: 31-13: 13,***

***Luke 4: 21-30***

Love Love Love .....Love Love Love

It was St. John of Lennon and the Blessed Paul Macartneous who taught us the musical mantra, 'All you need is love.....Love is all you need.'

(Sing along please, we should have had it for our introit hymn.)

It has been the theme tune for the Baby Boomer generation and we have grown up and grown old on its affirmative and banal simplicities. It was produced at the height of the Western cultural revolution when there was an increasing and common assumption that we knew better than our parents, relationships would be on a new footing, world peace could be obtained by everybody taking the same benevolent narcotic in optimum conditions and sexual license would lead to a transformation of society. Repression and the other RE word, Religion, were dead.

Well we didn't, as it turns out, know better than the generations of our ancestors. Relationships have become more instant, more shallow, more friable and more damaged. World peace is still some way off but the drug culture thrives in all its hideous distorting criminality. Sexual license

has proved, unsurprisingly, to be a gateway to misery, loneliness and childlessness. Religion is correspondingly moribund in native Western culture and that is not coincidental to our crisis. Indeed it is the root cause of our problem. Failure to understand the origin of love in the divine and its redemptive power reduces human love to a mere ganglion of selfish feelings.

Whatever this love was that was so charmingly advertised in memorable jingles, it wasn't the real McCoy. For that we have to turn to this morning's epistle from St. Paul to the church at Corinth. Chosen for a majority of weddings and frequently read inaudibly and without sense or understanding, it remains the gold standard of the Christian proclamation.

First of all St. Paul reminds us that all these things are gifts. They are gifts of God and, like children at Christmas, we pray for these gifts.

Paul lists the showier gifts. If I talk to you with great eloquence but don't love you, I am a noisy windbag. Big ta-ra – no product. If I am a clever clogs but don't love you – it's very impressive but utterly vacuous. If I am very generous but because I want you to know how generous I am, not because I love you, it's just a charade. Paul gets right behind the carefully constructed pretence of self worth. This is what love is, he says. Check these out with me and be humbled:

Love is patient and kind – I often fall at the first hurdle here. Love does not envy or boast – Envy not an issue but there are, I have discovered, quite a lot of subtle ways of boasting.

It is not arrogant or rude. Oh dear, more failure.

It does not insist on its own way. There are, of course, more manipulative ways of saying 'My way or the highway'. We all have favourite techniques for getting our own way

It is not irritable or resentful. This is often a personality trait that needs a lot of work and divine healing. It's a learnt defence that gets in the way of friendship.

It does not rejoice at wrongdoing. How tricky it is not to give an inward whoop of joy when someone we don't like screws up.

Love rejoices with the truth. It wants the best for all. It is Christ on the Cross for you and for me. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Notice, in this last glorious summary, the interweaving of the gifts that Paul will conclude as the greatest. Love which is truly love- and not this ersatz saccharine confection of popular culture- will bear all, endure all and never end. It is total and sacrificial. It is not about my personal comfort or preference but about the good of the other. It is salvific. It is Christ on the Cross for me and for you.

And it is supported by the two other great gifts, Faith and Hope. They are useless without love but Love cannot endure and fulfil its task without them.

Faith is an exercise of supreme trust. We do not bestow it lightly. We place our faith in those whom we have learned to trust and who, by their actions, have demonstrated their love for us and their constant and consistent intention for our wellbeing. There are human exemplars but supremely we look to the unchanging love of God. Faithfulness opens the possibility of self- abandonment to the other and the fullness of our becoming in love. Unfaithfulness wounds love.

And Hope. Hope is not the unreasonable expectation of the fantastic but the stretching out in longing which fixes our gaze on the far horizon and makes the spiritual space for faithfulness and love to lead us on to the fulfilment of the Divine. Hopelessness is the portal of the damned.

Now, as St. Paul says, we see through a glass darkly. Then we shall see face to face and know as fully as we are known by God. Faith, Hope and Love, the three great theological virtues, revolve around and support each other. Love is the great ringmaster of the soul. Love is Christ on the Cross for you and for me