



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-February 24th 2019

*Readings: 1 Samuel 26: 2 7-9 12-13 22-23, Psalm 102, 1 Paul 15: 45-49,
Luke 6: 27-38*

Two weeks ago, I promised you that I would continue our look at the Sacrament of Confession. Then we encountered how vital it was in the life and ministry of the key characters in that Sunday's readings –Isaiah, St. Paul and St. Peter. Only in their acknowledgement of their sinfulness and inadequacy and utter dependence on God could their souls be healed, their lives reconciled, their hearts filled with thanksgiving and they could be used in powerful and fruitful ministry. We are no different. The same spiritual rules apply.

Today I want to look, in the light of the beautiful psalm we have just prayed, at what might keep us from this encounter with God's love and mercy.

A story:

An old and revered spiritual director once described our dilemmas thus: Imagine, if you will, seven men in a room. Each of them is carrying around a hundredweight sack of ripe manure strapped on his back. Apart from anything else it is insupportable and slows each man down in all he does. Unfortunately, none of them have the capacity to remove their own burden. It is, frankly, embarrassing and each of them is hoping

that, out of politeness, no-one will mention it and that the others have lost their sense of smell.

Into the room comes an angel, a messenger of God. He approaches the first man and offers to lead him to the place where his burden can be lifted and he can be washed clean.

The man is outraged. He denies the very existence of the dung bag. 'There is nothing there young man and I'll thank you not to mention it again.' This is the delusional response, so preposterous that it is tragically comical. St. John tells us that the man who says he is without sin deceives himself and the truth is not in him. A nice man in one of my congregations told me that he couldn't remember sinning. I suggested he ask his wife to make a list. He returned the following week saying simply, 'Point taken, Father, point taken'.

The angel approaches the second man. As he reaches out, the man exclaims: 'It's mine. Leave it alone. Mind your own business. It is MINE.' It is true that sin makes us very lonely people, but the effects of sin are not restricted to the sinner. What we do affects all those around us. You cannot privatise sin.

The third man is not aggressive, just forlorn.

'I don't doubt your good intention', he says to the angel, 'but, even if you are right, I shall probably only make this wretched mess again.'

Probably true but the fact that I get my hands dirty when laying the fire does not mean that, because I will be laying the fire again tomorrow, I will not bother to wash before cooking the dinner. And at a more existential level – when we were children, we grew out of sitting in our own mess. The spiritual life has its parallels. By pursuing maturity in Christ, we gradually grow out of sitting in our own mess.

The fourth man is quite blunt.

'I know the sack is there, but I simply don't believe anyone has the

power to get rid of it. After all, I've tried and failed.'

This is a failure of hope and faith. If we say this, we doubt the power of God. We doubt His mercy and His love. Christ died for this purpose. We place our trust in Him. Sometimes people say, 'But I can't forgive myself...' This is to make ourselves more important than God! It's the sin of pride.

The fifth man is equally forthright:

'Actually pal, I think you'll find I've got a bigger sack than any of them.

When it comes to the biggest stinker competition, it's a no contest.'

This is the man who has cherished and polished his sins. This is me. This is what I'm like. Take it or leave it. I do it My Way. Get over it.

The sixth man is rather downcast. He tells the angel:

'It's been so long now, I really can't remember what is in it any more nor how it got there. I've got used to it now. Who would want to bother with me?' All the more urgent to get there now and become a frequent visitor to the house of healing. Let the divine mercy begin to unpack your sorrows and get to the root of your grief and lift the burden.

The last man is briefly illuminated by hope then crestfallen. He tells the angel: 'Look. I'd really like to get rid of it BUT.....you tell me I have to go to the mercy seat of the King? Imagine turning up at the palace in this state. Who, in his right mind, would let me in? And I'd be so embarrassed' You will be in good company. The priest is a stinker too. He is a regular penitent. If you feel embarrassed, imagine the glorious humiliation of the priest when he kneels before his brother priest in the confessional.

These are the less than magnificent seven responses.

Seven of the many reasons why we can deprive ourselves of the sacrament of liberation. You may resonate with some of these or have

your own response. Remember also that none of these excuses should ever keep us from the love of God. The confessional is a place of grace and mercy. It is the place where God the Father runs out to meet His beloved prodigal sons and daughters, embraces them substitutes their paupers' rags for beautiful robes and throws a great party in Heaven.

The Psalmist tells true when he records:

My soul, give thanks to the Lord all my being, bless his holy name.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his blessings.

It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion. Amen. Hallelujah.