



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year A-September 6th 2020

Readings: Ezekiel 33: 7-9, Psalm 94, Romans 13: 8-10,

Matthew 18: 15-20

‘If you love your fellow men you will have carried out your obligations.’
As the charming little animal on the insurance adverts says, ‘SIMPLES’.
For a variety of reasons my mind has been preoccupied, over the last few days, by the subject of ‘Grace’.

Immediately because some young friends of ours have just had a longed for baby girl whom they have named ‘Grace’.

A month previous while reviewing the longlist of those souls who have made a difference to my life, I was recalling the old Church Army sister from my first parish, Sr. Grace. Her down to earth wit and wisdom made her a great companion on the rougher parts of the pilgrim road.

Then, a week or two ago, I sent out a sheet of some pre-prandial ‘Graces’
Finally my hand was nudged by my philosopher friend with one of those accusatory questions of his. ‘When was the last time you heard a sermon on Sanctifying Grace?’ (This a cue to go rustle through my files and confess, vaguely, – ‘Quite a long time’)

Those of us with some religious background can occasionally be heard wittering gratefully something along the lines of, ‘There but for the grace of God...’ as we managed to avoid some unpleasant outcome.

Or, more triumphantly, ‘By the Grace of God’ if we are aware of some

little additional help that has got us through. All to the good and nothing wrong with that. At least we are aware of the activity of the Divine and not just attributing it to fortune or karma or some other indifferent deterministic hoo-ha.

Nonetheless, our interpretation of Grace, if limited to the occasional hefty push in the right direction, reduces the reality of God's intervention to the equivalent of a sort of 'Supernatural Sooty' waving his wand and sprinkling the believer with 'Oofle Dust'.

(Note for readers under 40 or abroad....Sooty the Bear was a 1950s TV glove puppet with magic powers – long before the advent of Harry Potter)

The point about Sanctifying Grace is more consistent and consequential. We are natural beings, albeit made in the image of God, created for a supernatural purpose. The only way in which we can transcend our limitation and fulfil our intended destiny is by God's free gift – which is Grace.

This Grace is not a momentary intervention but rather a condition of this little, fragile, limited human person beginning, here and now, to live in the Presence of the Divine Life of the Holy Trinity. It means having the life of the Godhead dwelling within us. It means inviting the One who 'stands at the door and knocks' into our heart and minds and souls and lives. This co-inherence is the beginning of the transformation and the possibility of transcendence. St. Thomas Aquinas said, 'Grace is the beginning of Glory within us'. This, of course, is pure St. Paul who, in his explanation of the mystery of the ages, now revealed in the Gospel, is explained in Colossians 1 v 27, where he proclaims,

'Christ in you – the hope of glory'. The indwelling of the Divine.

Our human words fail in trying to describe this ultimate glory. We know only that, of God Himself, it is the fulfilment of truth and beauty and goodness.

If this seems a tall order and rather frightening, we need to be reassured.

It is indeed a tall order but God has made possible this encounter, this

indwelling and this growth in the Divine life in a very practical way. God grants us, physical beings, physical signs and tangible routes. He grants us the sign of Christ's Body on earth, the Church – the family of Faith. Within that Body he offers us the Seven (number of divine perfection) Sacraments. A Sacramentum is an oath, a promise, a pledge. Amazingly it refers, not to our commitment and reliability (thank God) but to God's. The Sacraments are not simply signs but the very place where GOD Himself has GUARANTEED His Presence and participation. Our participation in the Sacraments, worthily and wittingly, invite us, here and now, into the Divine Life and preface a foretaste of our destiny. By participation in the signs, we participate in the eternal reality hidden within those blessed gifts. Roads into our hearts, they are the roads home to the Eternal City.

Many long years ago, on the eve of my ordination into the Anglican ministry, I got the frights. The full crushing weight of what was expected of me came crashing down in the long night of prayer. I told God I couldn't do it. I went to see the old spiritual director in the early hours and told him what I had told God.

'Father, I have not got enough love in me to spend the next forty years loving and serving God's people. I just can't do it.'

To my astonishment the old priest leapt out of his chair and gave me a big hug.

He sat down. 'Congratulations,' he said, 'join the rest of the human race.'

'Of course you cannot do it. But God will. You have to be where He sends you and be always open to the workings of His Grace. He is faithful. He will do it. If you are to minister His Grace, you must daily receive His Grace. You are the channel not the source which is endless and is Christ.'

Forty years on I have long learnt that it has nothing to do with feelings and everything to do with faithfulness – overwhelmingly His – as I open, daily, the shabby temple of my heart and kneel in the Light of the

Presence and receive what He commands me to pass on.

CHRIST IN YOU – THE HOPE OF GLORY

The transfiguration and apotheosis of Man by His sanctifying Grace
alone.

‘If you love your fellow man, you will fulfil your obligations.’ SIMPLES