



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year A-September 27<sup>th</sup> 2020

***Readings: Ezekiel 18: 25-28, Psalm 24, Philippians 2: 1-11, Matthew 21 : 28-32***

‘At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow.’

Up until recently few people will have heard of Fr James Altman. He is the youngish priest of the otherwise insignificant parish of St. James the Less, La Crosse, Wisconsin. (For the geographically challenged, like me, Wisconsin borders the great lakes, sandwiched between Minnesota, Iowa and Chicago and La Crosse is on the mighty Mississippi as it wanders on down to Brownsville and Reno). Listing its famous people – all four of them – La Crosse has a district attorney suspended for phone abuse, the grave robber who inspired *Silence of the Lambs* a girl tragically missing since 1953 and the current Democratic Party Rep.

You get the picture. Fifth Avenue it ain't.

Well Fr. Altman has changed all that. He is in trouble. And, NO, it isn't the usual. Fr. Altman is in trouble for telling the truth. He regularly broadcast his masses and had a regular following for his very frank and orthodox sermons. Last month he went just too far – well too far for his bishop, William Callahan. In this heartland of Democratic politics, Fr. Altman announced that, given the hard-line pro-abortion, homosexual and transsexual agenda of the Democratic Party, it would be impossible for a Catholic to vote for them. (No-one pretends that our American

cousins are faced with an easy choice). Bishop Callahan who, at 70, had up til then led a pretty quiet life was deluged with complaints AND messages of support for the priest. Bp. Callahan's response was to publish a letter which said that the Gospel way forward was to reprimand his brother in private and if he didn't shut up there would be canonical consequences. What bothered Callahan was not the doctrinal or ethical content – that he acknowledged was true, after all it was straight from the Catechism. The noble prelate was bothered by 'the tone'. He preferred the quiet conversation with the erring politician etc etc. Fifty years of which, he might reflect, had got precisely nowhere. Heaven knows what Bp Callahan would have made of the intemperate language of Jesus or John the Baptist.

Anyway, Altman is not allowed to put his masses on the net for now and the bishop's final word is still awaited in this burgeoning political minefield. All we knew for the moment was that 'tone' apparently trumps truth. In the meantime, another bishop, from Texas, rowed in to the row over Altman. Bishop Strickland wholeheartedly supported Altman and said that he was ashamed that it had taken him personally so long to stand up. Bishop Paprocki of Illinois told his people that the Democrat stand on abortion is not a position a Catholic can support. And so on. Other Catholic bishops weighed in behind Biden's version of Catholicism, more attuned to the culture than to Christianity.

Why does this 'sideshow in Hicksville' matter here or indeed to the Universal Church. It matters because it is a litmus test of the fidelity of the Apostolic Hierarchy in the most powerful country in the world and a sometime redoubt of the Faith. Fr. James Altman should not have spoken as he did.....let me explain that.....Fr. James Altman should not have needed to speak as he did. His bishop, William Callahan, and all the Catholic bishops of America should have done it – A LONG TIME AGO. Fr. Altman's job – and mine- would then be simply to pass on the Apostolic message to our people. Our job is to be the messenger not the

message. The bishops' long corporate silence has contributed to the tragic hijacking of a once great party of liberty and care for the weak.

This matters because we are watching a symptomatic contest for the future of our Faith and the civilisation whose ethics and mores and freedoms it created. All the US bishops needed to do was to reissue and reaffirm that comprehensive and magisterial document issued by them in 1998 – Living the Gospel of Life. Nor can we be smug over here. In this country, and much of the old European heartland of the Faith, you would be hard pressed to find any party espousing sufficient pro-life credentials to even have the debate.

In my lifetime, 'Wickedness tolerated has become wickedness enthroned'. Just how vital that contest is can be measured by the events of the last few months. Today we heard St. Paul's ringing assertion that: 'At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow.' To which, judging by current conditions, the response would have to be, 'Apparently not'.

As followers of Jesus we are inhibited from kneeling at Mass before the Blessed Sacrament yet we watch, on our TV screens, footballers genuflecting before each match in honour of a movement dedicated, amongst other things, in its manifesto (now shrewdly removed from the website), to the end of the family.

Then last week we listened to the news media go into hagiographic overdrive about the late Justice Ruth Ginsburg and watched her become the first woman to lie in state in U.S. history, only the second Justice to do so. Her supporters queued up to pay emotional homage, pausing only to barrack the President when he came to pay his respects. Ginsburg's great claim to fame was to entrench ever deeper the abortion laws of the country. Even this year she was part of a Supreme Court majority that struck down a state law that gave greater protection to the unborn. Little wonder that Representative Doug Collins tweeted, as the wailing and politicking began over Ginsburg's coffin, that he personally wished RIP to the 30 million innocents murdered on her watch and, to her dying

breath, with her enthusiastic support.

These are uncomfortable words but it is now clear that there is, as there always has been, a war on. Those who bow the knee to Jesus alone and those who have turned back to the monstrous gods of pagan materialism and their ceaseless demand for the sacrifice of the innocent. While the battle lines currently converge around an election this is about so much more than America's unhappy choice. It is not going to be an easy time for Catholic Christians but we must encourage one another in solidarity around the central truths of the Faith. It will be a long march back to recapture the great institutions and political vehicles that were founded by our forebears in the Faith to implement God's mercy and justice. We need be in no doubt as to the scale of the task.

As I finished writing this sermon last night two cheering news items came through. The nominee for the Supreme Court is a Catholic mother AND the bishops of the USA have issued a statement and rallying call to the Catholic faithful defining the key election issue as the right to life.

Thanks be to God. Pray for continuing courage for our Apostolic leaders and for all who must stand in the frontline.

Because on the Day of Judgement all of us will have to bow the knee to Jesus and give Him an account of our actions – or lack of them.