



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year A-October 4th 2020

***Readings: Isaiah 5: 1-7, Psalm 79, Philipians 4: 6-9,
Matthew 21: 33-43***

The procession of a coffin is often accompanied by words of Scripture, not the least of which come from the Book of Job:

‘We brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can take nothing out. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.’

That, brothers and sisters, is the unarguable reality. Everything comes from God. But it is also a reality that we have to deal with the Providence of the Lord for the duration of our mortal coil. In order to do this Man has, historically, constructed or evolved ‘economic systems.’ Some are compatible with Faith, some are clearly hostile.

We have seen the monarchical system, purporting to reflect the ‘One over all’ rule of God in human terms. This, historically, has seldom been more than a thin disguise for megalomania and national gangsterism. (Read the warning in 1 Samuel Ch.8). What we know as Constitutional Monarchy is not monarchy at all but a benevolent avoidance of unaccountable Republicanism.

We have witnessed oligarchy and aristocratic rule (from the Greek for ‘best rulers’) – which has proved, on the whole, to be best for the rulers

rather than a reflection of the rulers' unimpeachable claims of superiority over the ruled.

We have had Feudalism – a system of loyalties, land tenures and military service which promoted a long, impoverished status quo for the majority.

We have had Mercantilism – that system of rampant global trade and fierce protectionism whereby a State could hope to leverage its way to staggering wealth.

In the more recent centuries we have witnessed the triumph of Capitalism, a system whose virtues encourage industry and allow a man to set his productive years against his declining ones in maintaining himself un-dependent on the State. While its weakness is that it can easily become a manifesto for rampant individualism and rapacious greed - an erroneous doctrine of ownership if untempered by the two Great Commandments of the Judeo-Christian Canon.

We have seen the rise of Socialism – an assertion that all things, production, distribution and exchange belong to the State. In its benevolent intentions it is an attempt to ameliorate the lot of the poor and bring to bear the State's interpretation of social justice. In its extreme form of materialistic Godless Marxism, it has proved more costly in its death count and systematic cruelty than any of the tyrannies that preceded it.

There is the little known and hardly practised 'Distributism' which arose from the social teaching of Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. This rejected both unbridled laissez-faire Capitalism AND State Socialism as flawed and exploitative. It majored on the inalienable right to property, proliferation of small businesses, wide ownership of production, anti-trust laws to control the globalisers, and the promotion of mutuals (like John Lewis). It was anti BIG STATE and BIG CORPORATION. And widely dismissed as a romantic throwback - but never tried.

So much to choose from – in some places there is, of course, no choice.

Which means that the very business of our choosing economic models depends on our freedom to do so. Hence Democracy becomes a lynchpin of our political assent and contract one with another.

Thank you, father, for your erudite exposition of our political options.

What has this got to do with the Gospel?

Well, for a start, Jesus tells us the story of the Tenants in the Vineyard.

This is a common prophetic picture of the People of God. God has GIVEN them the vineyard. They are tenants, leaseholders. They do not own it. The individuals do not own it in perpetuity. The State does not own it. It is God's gift, His Providence.

It is a reminder that we, in reality, own nothing. We are temporary tenants of the planet Earth, our island home. How we respond to that gift is critical. The Christian, be he socialist, capitalist, distributist, must first and foremost acknowledge that everything belongs to and comes from and is accountable to God. Man's personal 'ownership' is an illusion. He may seek security of tenure for his duration of the lease of this life but all reverts to God, including Man himself. The tenants in the vineyard have forgotten the basis on which the lease was granted. They have forgotten that they are but Stewards, great sharers in the bounty of the One in whom the eternal Freehold resides, but essentially the highly privileged and trusted servants of the Master.

And when Man forgets that things inevitably fall apart.

The rejection of the authority of God leads to hardheartedness and thanklessness. It further gravitates from rejection and contempt to the circle of violence. The messengers are thrashed, then murdered.

The Son comes and they see the chance of capturing the whole estate. Rebellion becomes regicide. The Crucifix hangs over the site of Man's revolt. A Christian cannot separate his politics and economics from his Faith. The former must derive from the latter.

Because God chose to become Man in Christ, the incarnation of truth, these things matter. As Christians our Politics (the Polis – the Greek for

the running of the city) and our Economics (Oikonomos – the Greek for ‘house rules’ – how we run our provision and distribution and welfare of all) must derive from our acknowledgement of our very temporary stewardship and our eternal hope. We brought nothing into this world. We own nothing. All is gift.

God is PROVIDENTIAL. We are PROVISIONAL.

How we respond to that reality will inevitably determine our eternal prospect.