

*Homily of Archbishop Leo Cushley*

*At the funeral of the Reverend Benedict Robinson, St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh*

*28 September 2013*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we commend the soul of Father Ben Robinson to almighty God, we do so with hope in the Lord's mercy and forgiveness, the hope which his boundless love gives all of us.

The first reading, from the Book of Lamentations, starts darkly, but it is precisely about this hope. It is also interesting to note who is speaking in this bleak way. In one line, the speaker says, "My portion is the Lord, so I will hope in him". When I hear "My portion is the Lord", it sounds as if we were listening to the prayer of a Levitical priest, as the Levites did not receive land in Israel as their heritage, but instead their "portion" or inheritance was the Lord alone. Although we don't know for sure who is speaking here, we can imagine, at least for a moment, that we are listening to the lamentation of a priest. And in doing so, we can imagine that we are listening to the prayer of a priest who is now without strength, who has been discouraged, who ponders his anguish and affliction. And yet, having confronted his personal situation, he is now at the point where he effectively decides to get a grip. He has painted a grim picture of how far he has sunk, saying "My strength is gone, that hope which came to me from the Lord". But now, like the prodigal son, he picks himself up and says: right: "This is what I shall tell my heart, and so recover hope: the favours of the Lord are *not* all past, his kindnesses

are *not* all exhausted; every morning they are *renewed*; *great* is his faithfulness”.

This small flame of encouragement that the speaker in the first reading offers himself is built upon and given greater strength by our second reading from St Paul to the Romans. Paul writes boldly, “With God on our side who can be against us? ... when God acquits could anyone condemn? ... [So] nothing can come between us and the love of Christ”. Here are strong and reassuring words. If Christ cannot break that bond, then we too are utterly incapable of breaking it, in spite of our actions or omissions, or even our hatred for ourselves.

This sentiment of confidence is further strengthened by the Gospel passage, where we hear the loving words of Jesus for those who believe in him: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away” ... [and] the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me”. In other words, the loving power of the Father envelopes all of us through the redemption of Christ and gives us the assurance that he will raise up the believer on the last day.

Like Father Ben, whom we remember before God today, all priests are taken from the people to serve God and themselves. We priests are made of nothing no better or worse than anyone else, but we receive a great deal, and so more is expected of us - by God, by the people, and by ourselves.

Priests are called forth by God from among their brothers and sisters to serve both God and man in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

First of all, we must always remember that it is God that does the calling. Priests and religious can spend many years deceiving themselves that it's “their” vocation, practically a career decision like, or nearly like, any other.

But others know, sometimes through tears and bitter tests, that the priesthood they carry in earthen vessels is not their own. When we really *know* that, it becomes a great comfort also to realise that we don't choose God; God chooses *us*, he commissions us, in our sinfulness and unworthiness, and just as he calls us to be priests, he calls us to holiness – not once, but again and again until, by his grace and by his pruning of us, we finally realize that “my vocation to the priesthood” is really *his* vocation to *us*. There is nothing we can do to merit our share in Christ's sanctification of the world at our hands.

And yet we are called, again and again, often in spite of ourselves, to follow our Master, to imitate his purity and humility and single-minded purpose in the salvation of souls, thereby letting ourselves – sometimes slowly and painfully - be moulded and sanctified by him in the process.

In one of the most poignant moments in the Gospels, Peter kneels at Jesus' feet and says “Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man”. If I have never knelt, *coram Domino*, once before the Lord to say these words and really mean them, I wonder what kind of priest I would be?

So unless we know our need of Christ and his forgiveness, unless we have felt once the solitude and brokenness of the priest in the first reading, I think we will never quite be able to communicate Christ's forgiveness and compassion to others in our pastoral life, we will never be the humble instruments in God's hand that we are meant to be. We are all broken to a greater or lesser extent: let us acknowledge it and let it be a spur to us to assist others, more humbly and willingly, in their search for God, for forgiveness, and for peace.

Today, we remember the long life and briefer ministry of Father Ben Robinson in the Archdiocese. As we ask God to forgive his sins, and to welcome him into the company of heaven, we also ask the Lord to be gracious

to us, especially to his priests, that he may gently remind us that the favours of the Lord are not all past; that God's kindnesses are never exhausted; that every morning he renews them to us; and that great is his faithfulness.

May Father Ben's soul, and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.