



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR  
**CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE**  
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Fr Frank Brennan SJ  
Rector

16 October 2022

Exodus 17:8-13; Psalm 120; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2; Luke 18:1-8

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/frank-brennan-6/homily-161022>

In today's gospel Jesus tells the story of the self-interested judge and the desperate widow who kept pestering the judge demanding: 'I want justice'. In the end, the judge decides to give the widow her just rights, if only to stop her pestering him. Jesus says: 'Now will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them? I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily.' Scripture scholar Brendan Byrne tells us that the point of the parable rests on an a fortiori logic: 'If the unjust judge at long last - though through base and self-interested motives - moves to grant justice to the woman, how much more certainly and readily will the God of all goodness move to grant justice to chosen ones who make entreaty day and night.'<sup>1</sup>

This week we marked the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. When Pope John XXIII announced the council on the 25 January 1959, he had been Pope for only three months. He was something of a novice on the Roman scene, having spent much of his life as a Vatican diplomat in Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece and France. Meeting with only 17 Cardinals at St Pauls Outside the Walls, John said, 'We know that the new Pope is watched by many fervent and friendly elements, as well as by those which are unfriendly or uncertain, seeking to discover from what is most characteristic what one may have the right to expect from him.'<sup>2</sup> Little did they know what was coming! He had sought advice from a few trusted advisors, all of whom had counselled against the convening of the council - much like those characters in Yes Minister. Ultimately he made his own decision. It is said that even Cardinal Montini, John's trusted friend and later to be

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<sup>1</sup> Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, St Pauls, 2000, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Announcement of Ecumenical Council and Roman Synod*, 25 January 1959, available at <https://vatican2voice.org/91docs/announcement.htm>



his successor as Paul VI, was sceptical, confiding to a friend, 'This holy old boy doesn't seem to realise what a hornet's nest he stirring up.'<sup>3</sup>

In a radio address a month before the commencement of the council, John emphasised two points: the need for peace between peoples and social justice for all. Taking up these two themes, the council fathers, a week after the commencement of the council, issued a Message to All Humanity asserting that the church was 'supremely necessary for the modern world if injustices and unworthy inequalities are to be denounced and if the true order of affairs and of values is to be restored so that man's life can become more human according to the standards of the gospel.'<sup>4</sup>

At each session of the council, the fathers commenced with the ancient prayer of Saint Isidore of Seville which included this petition to the Spirit: 'May You, who are infinite justice, never permit that we be disturbers of justice. Let not our ignorance induce us to evil, nor flattery sway us, nor moral and material interest corrupt us. But unite our hearts to You alone, and do it strongly, so that, with the gift of Your grace, we may be one in You and may in nothing depart from the truth. Thus, united in Your name, may we in our every action follow the dictates of your mercy and justice'.<sup>5</sup>

This week on the feast of Saint John XXIII, Pope Francis celebrated the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the council. He called on us to 'rediscover the Council in order to restore primacy to God, to what is essential: to a Church madly in love with its Lord and with all the men and women whom he loves; to a Church that is rich in Jesus and poor in assets; to a Church that is free and freeing'. Like Pope John at the beginning of his pontificate, Francis, nine years into his, knows that he presides over a church wracked by conflict, divisions and intrigue. He challenges all of us when he says:

'We are always tempted to start from ourselves rather than from God, to put our own agendas before the Gospel, to let ourselves be caught up in the winds of worldliness in order to chase after the fashions of the moment or to turn our back on the time that Providence has granted us, in order to retrace our steps. Yet let us be careful: both the "progressivism" that lines up behind the world and the "traditionalism" - or "looking backwards" - that longs for a bygone world are not evidence of love, but of infidelity. They are forms of a Pelagian selfishness that

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Cahill, Pope John XXIII, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> The Documents of Vatican II, Walter Abbott (ed.), Geoffrey Chapman, 1966, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. xxii.



puts our own tastes and plans above the love that pleases God, the simple, humble and faithful love that Jesus asked of Peter.’<sup>6</sup>

If you’re like me, you readily accept his critique of the traditionalists, but look for escape clauses when he speaks of progressives who line up behind the world. If you’re not like me, you probably embrace his critique of the worldly progressives and cringe a little at his take on the traditionalists.

Sixty years on from the commencement of Vatican II, Francis sees unity, joy, and the commitment to justice for all as the key fruits of the Spirit. He is sick to death of the whingers and the plotters. He says, ‘Yet how many of us are unable to live the faith with joy, without grumbling and criticizing? A Church in love with Jesus has no time for quarrels, gossip and disputes. May God free us from being critical and intolerant, harsh and angry! This is not a matter of style but of love.’

Francis gives us all pause to reflect when he asks: ‘How often, in the wake of the Council, did Christians prefer to choose sides in the Church, not realizing that they were breaking their Mother’s heart! How many times did they prefer to cheer on their own party rather than being servants of all? To be progressive or conservative rather than being brothers and sisters? To be on the “right” or “left”, rather than with Jesus? To present themselves as “guardians of the truth” or “pioneers of innovation” rather than seeing themselves as humble and grateful children of Holy Mother Church.’

None of us escapes his papal critique on this 60th anniversary of the Council. Humbled and a touch chastened, let’s join with Francis in his prayer of thanks: ‘We thank you, Lord, for the gift of the Council. You who love us, free us from the presumption of self-sufficiency and from the spirit of worldly criticism. Prevent us from excluding ourselves from unity. You who lovingly feed us, lead us forth from the shadows of self-absorption. You who desire that we be a united flock, save us from the forms of polarization and the “isms” that are the devil’s handiwork.’

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Homily, 60th Anniversary of the Beginning of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 11 October 2022, available at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2022/documents/20221011-omelia-60concilio.pdf>



R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

I lift up my eyes toward the mountains;  
whence shall help come to me?  
My help is from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

May he not suffer your foot to slip;  
may he slumber not who guards you:  
Indeed he neither slumbers nor sleeps,  
the guardian of Israel.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade;  
he is beside you at your right hand.  
The sun shall not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The LORD will guard you from all evil;  
he will guard your life.  
The LORD will guard your coming and your going,  
both now and forever.

R. Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.