



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday of Lent Year A

God looks at the heart

Readings: *1 Sam 16:1, 6-7, 10-13, Ps 22, Ephesians 5: 8-14, John 9: 1-41*

Scarcely a day passes, in the frenzy of the modern media world, when we are not apprised of some adolescent who has harmed themselves or, worse, done themselves fatal harm because of bullying, abuse or simply internalised feelings of inadequacy about their body image.

In a world of images, where the power brokers are not the competent but the commentariat, those whose self appointed role is not to deliver but to criticise, in forensic detail, the efforts of those who do things. Small wonder that this lopsided social intercourse has taught young people that criticism is more powerful than action and to be a critical observer is more satisfying than to be a committed player. Image matters above content and what we look like matters more than who we really are. That is the prevailing lie of our culture.

In such a world virtue is no competition for glamour, truth a regular loser to the management of popularity.

It is for this reason, among others, that I am always mightily cheered by encountering anew this morning's Old Testament text on the choosing of David to be King of Israel.

You may recall that the whole issue of kingship is a thorny one for Israel. They had never had a king until very recently, always previously governed by prophets and judges. In their desire to 'be like everybody else' they had petitioned God, through the prophet Samuel, for a king – to make them like other nations. Samuel had warned them, on two counts, against this development.

First, the elevation of a man to kingship looked dangerously like rejecting the sovereignty of God. Israel was a theocracy or it was nothing, its purpose among the nations was specifically NOT to be like everyone else but to be God's servant and lead men back to God.

Second, Samuel observed, the record of Kings (and aristocracy for that matter) was to domineer, enslave, rob, conscript, tax and trample on the rights of their fellow man in constructing a hierarchy based on power and its abuse (See I Sam 8). Did they really want that?

The short answer was that Israel was tired of being special. They wanted a human overlord. So they got one and his name was Saul. The most telling description of him, prior to his selection and anointing, was that he was a very imposing physical figure – literally head and shoulders above his contemporaries. It is, as we know, a reign that was doomed to failure and Samuel is now clandestinely embarking on the task of preparing the future by seeking out God's choice for the next king. This is both treason and a travesty of dynastic expectation.

As a result of prayer and discernment Samuel has shipped up at Bethlehem and the household of Jesse. Curiously his expectations still depend on image prejudice. He looks up and down the ranks of the eligible brothers

and he assesses that the tall good looking one is the obvious choice. Surely God must have chosen Eliab.

Thanks be to God, God doesn't think like that. The Lord tells Samuel, 'Never mind what a man looks like.....I look at the heart.'

What matters is not image or height or polished teeth or the right trainers, what matters is the heart of man. God chooses according to his own standards.

So when God was looking for a king to govern Israel, he did not look for a Jewish Arnold Schwarznegger. He chose a little shepherd boy. When God looked for a woman to minister to the destitute and dying on the streets of Calcutta, He did not select Miss World. He chose a tiny, plain, humble, poor peasant girl from the Albanian borderlands.

Image is utterly misleading.

What matters is how conformed we are to the image of God, in which we were created. What matters is how conformed our hearts are to the will of God. We need not worry about what other people think of us, the only opinion that matters is God's.

When God wants someone to do great things He will not choose a commentator. He will choose a man or woman after His own heart, seeking only to reflect the divine image and, with them and through them and in them, He will do great things and glorify His Name.