



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

A first Mass

Readings: Ezekiel 2: 2-5, Ps 122, 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10, Mark 6: 1-6

To be asked to accompany men on their journey to priesthood is an immense privilege. So, when some seminarians booked a retreat at Fowey a couple of years ago I was thrilled and, in a series of addresses, told them all I knew about priesthood.

Last year they came back, with some of their brothers, to spend six days preparing for the diaconate. I duly preached a series of addresses on all I knew of the ministry of the deacon.

To my astonishment and delight they came back last week on the verge of their priestly ordination. (In prison language these men are serious recidivists.) There was nothing left in the drawer so I had to talk to them about the little I have learnt in forty years of the transcendent glory of the God whom we set out serve and His infinite grace and mercy in coming among us in His Son, Jesus, and offering the sacrifice for our sins.

Now Fr. Jacek has granted me the singular honour of preaching at his first hometown Mass and I cannot adequately express how moved I am by that generous invitation. Such a latecomer and such a gift. Thank you.

You, people of St. Augustine, are rightly proud of this son of your parish and rejoice that Our Lord and Saviour, has called him to the apostolic service of the priesthood, to be a steward of the mysteries of God. He is called to teach his people, to proclaim the Gospel and to re-present the sacrifice day by day on your behalf.

You have, in Fr. Jacek what, in footballing terms would be described as a dependable midfielder, the heart of a team, with a good engine. There are no fluffy bits, no frilly edges. He has the Catholic Faith and he does what it says on the tin. Between you and God you have produced a good man, a faithful follower of Jesus and a loyal servant of the Church. We need more of the same. That's enough about Fr. Jacek. Now let's get to the Gospel.

Jesus encounters a problem in his home town. They've known Him man and boy almost all His life and here He comes preaching to them. Who does He think He is? Where does He get all this from?

The same can happen in priesthood. The thing we have to remember, as priest and people is that the priest does not speak for himself in his teaching and prophetic role. He speaks for God. That is why he immerses himself five times a day in God's Word and kneels before the Presence in the Mass. He is not at liberty to preach his opinion but only what God reveals to His people. This is an uncomfortable task sometimes.

One of the problems created by the change of orientation at the altar is that it can mislead us into assuming that this is a human conversation within the enclosed circle of the congregation. Nothing could be further from the truth. The priest, like Aaron of old, comes before the altar of God with the names of his people on his breastplate. He comes before God on behalf of Man, arms outstretched and linked to the Universal Church throughout the world and throughout time to plead the Sacrifice. He comes before Man on

behalf of God to absolve, instruct, encourage and feed with the Bread of Life.

What he will expose to you, being penitent, is the mystery of the mercy of God and seek to lead you daily and forever to the eternal Kingdom of the Father.

He will stand for you daily before the Calvary of the Sacrifice and gaze, from that same wooden tower, upon all the people for whom Christ died. As a priest he will often be found on that road between the Via Dolorosa and the Miracle of the Third Day.

He has knelt often by Mary at Nazareth and prayed her prayer.

He has been in the Upper Room with her when the same Spirit that overshadowed her has burst upon the Apostolic band in Wind and Fire and drove them into the mission of which we are but the latest emissaries.

His genealogy is ancient, he is part of the bloodline of Grace. He will have stood with Abram under the dark and star bejewelled desert sky and heard the promise of futurity and the universal blessing.

He will have stood shoeless with Moses before the Bush of Fire and heard the command to lead his people to freedom from the slavery of sin.

He will have gone into the Holy Mountain to attend on the Word of God and bring it to you, not on tablets of stone but on his pastoral heart.

In a few minutes Fr. Jacek will invoke the Ghost of God, the Holy Spirit, the Presencer, upon the gifts of Melchisedek, the bread and the wine and upon you yourselves that they may all be transformed into Christ.

He will re-present the Sacrifice, the offering that reconciles Man to God and gives him hope of eternity in the Presence.

He will rejoice before the Holy Stone, linked by the reliquary to the whole company of angels and saints whose prayers surround us.

He will stand at the crossroads of the now and the forever. He will elevate the divinisation of our humanity in Christ.

He will celebrate the mortality that has now put on immortality.

He will reach from time into eternity, with the angelic assistance, to present you in Christ before the Mercy Seat and the Throne of Grace. His life will be lived out and spent on that borderline.

He will do it for Jesus and for you and for those, as yet unknown, to whom he will be sent – a faithful apostle.

That is what he will do for you.

What can you do for him?

Well, while he is among you, *in persona Christi*, you will do well to follow Our Lady's advice, 'Do whatever he tells you !'

But in the years he will be away on mission.....?

It is simply summed up in a great Rabbinic story of the Hasidim:

The Rabbi Baal Shem Tov stood praying for a long while in Synagogue. Every one else had finished praying and eventually left him and went home. Several hours later they returned and found him still deep in prayer. Later he told them, 'By leaving me alone in prayer you dealt me a painful separation. Hear this parable.'

'A bird of paradise of exquisite beauty, such as the eye of man had never seen, alighted at the top of the tallest tree in the kingdom. The king ordered his men to make a ladder up the tree to take the bird and its nest. Each man was to stand on the others shoulders forming a human ladder. It took a long time to build this living ladder. Eventually those nearest the ground lost patience, shook themselves free and everything collapsed.' Stand firm in your prayer. You never know whom you are holding up to Heaven.'

Those who reach for the secrets of Paradise cannot do so from a broken ladder. Their ascent for you is secured on your faithful prayer and attention.

Make sure Fr. Jacek and Fr. Peter are on your daily prayer list and thank God for His faithfulness in raising these men up to serve you and pray for those who, in the years to come, will follow them.