



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent Year A**

### ***The Son of Man is coming***

*Readings: Isaiah 2: 1-5, Ps 121, Romans 13: 11-14 Matthew 24: 37-44*

Thirty years ago, as a keen young curate, I had complained to my boss about the execrable standard of the reading of the lessons at Mass. His response was typical. 'Fine. You train them.'

So every Saturday morning I got to rehearse those who would be reading the following day. We cleared up a few bizarre pronunciations. We got the place names right. We adjusted the volume to bring it in the range of audibility. Most important of all we did a little work on context and meaning. Perhaps the most telling rehearsal I did was the first one though.

Sylvia's pronunciation was excellent. Her diction and volume perfect. Etc. etc. However..... Sylvia's lot fell on the story of Noah. She read it, with alarming clarity, in the way that she had, no doubt, read this charming little fairy tale to her grandchildren.

Noah went into his little ark with his wife and children and all the fluffy little animals. And it rained for forty days. Splish, splash, splosh. It was not Sylvia's fault. That's how she had heard it from her own childhood

onward. She had given the Noah toys to her children, read the cartoon books and sung the nursery rhyme song – ‘the rain came down and the flood came up’ – complete with silly actions. What she had entirely forgotten was the reality.

I called her away from the lectern. ‘Sylvia’, I said, ‘there are several problems here. First of all this is not a fairy story. It is the Word of God. Second this is a story of judgement on sin and utter devastation. A story so powerful that it remained in the memory of every civilisation that it touched for thousands of years. Third it accounts for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of human beings. Our treatment of too many Bible stories domesticates horror, dilutes supernatural truth and accommodates them to our comfortable thinking. Now, Sylvia, I want you to go back to the lectern and read it as if it was the account of the nuclear destruction of our own city and the survival of tiny remnant of humanity.

Sylvia then gave me the best reading of Noah I have ever heard. Why this preamble?

Well Jesus, in today’s Gospel, refers back to this cataclysmic event as a parallel, even an understatement of what it will be like when He comes again to judge the earth.

All week the lessons of the Office of readings in the Breviary have been filled with Apocalyptic as we move towards the Advent Season that will prepare us both for Christmas and for the end of the world and, incidentally, for our own dying.

So we need to grasp the enormity of what is going on. We need to connect with the scale of Salvation History. We need to understand the super-cosmic reality of the Divine Nature. We need to try to comprehend the amazing fact of His intervention in history and His persistent work for our salvation through absolute involvement in the humanity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Only if we begin to recapture a glimpse of that overwhelming truth and the eternal consequences of its acceptance or rejection in the heart of each and every man can we know the urgency of the Gospel and the need to rescue as many as possible from destruction and welcome them on board the Ark of Salvation which is the Church of Jesus Christ.

Christ is giving His disciples, and His disciples throughout the ages, a foresight of the end of history. He is aware that, just as in Noah's time, more and more will take no notice and ignore the Word of God and the signs of the times.

But the disciples have the same job now as then. To keep on building the Ark, the Universal Church, which has within it a place for every child of Man, prefigured in the sons of Noah, Shem and Ham and Japheth.

And just as no man knows the moment of his own dying so no man will know when the Lord will return. But we must be ready for either or both.