



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi (The Body & Blood of Christ)

Remember

Readings: Deuteronomy 8: 2-3, 4-16, Ps 147, John 6: 51-58

Ten years ago my mother-in-law died. (I was, like St Peter, one of those rare birds in Apostolic orders lucky enough to have a mother-in-law.)

Iris had lived with us for most of her widowhood – some twenty five years – and had been a wonderful friend, lovely grandmamma and tireless servant in the presbytery and the parish. During the last eight years of her life she suffered increasingly from vascular dementia. Her grasp of reality, her recognition and her memory began to slip daily from her grasp. The landmarks of her life were dismantled one by one. She no longer recognised photographs of her beloved husband. Old friends became new acquaintances every time they called. She knew us up until the last few months but did not know what we did. We would pass the church and she would comment on what a nice building it was. I would say the parish priest was a nice fellow and she would evince a desire to meet him.

In the final months only a treasured photo of her long dead mother remained as the last link with a vanishing life. She had entered, in the words of the psalmist, ‘the land where all things are forgotten’, long before her little frail body gave up the ghost.

In the decade since Iris' death the curse of dementia, Alzheimers etc, has spread its shadow more and more widely over the land. The media is full of it. Politicians calculate the insupportable cost of future care in a geriatric population and ordinary families struggle to hold on to each cherished connection with the victims of, what I came to call, 'the long goodbye'.

We check ourselves daily for failures of memory. Is this normal or should I have a quicker recall? Names, words elude me – now they take agonising seconds, minutes, hours as I shuffle up and down the dusty shelves of memory trying to locate the reference that once would have have flown out of the files, effortlessly across the synapses and onto the tongue. Like many of you I too am now nearer pressing the button for matron than pressing the buzzer for University Challenge.

And we panic, quietly, because memory is all we have. It identifies who we are. It is the place to which we can retreat. It is the very set of clues that gives meaning to the present and a context for the future. Without it we are adrift. Without it there is only unfamiliarity and the constant tyranny of the new.

We are at the mercy of a demonic existentialism where there is only 'now' and 'now' has no root in eternity or purpose in time.

Dementia comes from the same root as the Italian word 'dementicare', which means, simply, to forget. Just how devastating this is plays out in the lives of our loved ones who are smitten by this affliction. But I dwell on it today, the deferred Feast of Corpus Christi, because this affliction is no longer just a personal or familial tragedy. It is the very sickness at the heart of Western Civilisation. We do not have Alzheimers or vascular dementia

but we have forgotten who we are. We can no longer be sure of our identity or the landmarks of our personal life and corporate history. Western Civilisation has abandoned its Judeo- Christian roots, forgotten God, uncoupled itself from its ethical and doctrinal understanding and hitched its wagon to a merry-go- round of meaningless materialism and existential emotional experience.

You will recall the great millennium saga when tribes of politicians and the usual media circus tried to find something to celebrate that could be about anything but the obvious.... Jesus. And they ended up with an empty dome, a white elephant, as a fitting monument to their vacuity and wilful rejection of the Faith.

It is for this reason that Moses, in our Old Testament lesson, tells his people..... 'REMEMBER' what God did for you.

It is for this reason that a Jew has the Law on his doorpost and the devout wear a phylactery on their forehead – to keep the Law of God between their eyes and to guide their thinking on all things.

It is for this reason that the central event of our Christian Faith is the Mass, the Thanksgiving for what God has done for us in Christ and the 'REMEMBRANCE' of that sacrifice.

The remembrance of the Mass is, of course, more than simple memory or memorial. It is the place at which, in the Body and Blood of Christ, Man and God meet. It is the place at which time and eternity intersect. It is the altar upon which the mortal puts on immortality.

All Man's self understanding and all his hope of salvation, all his grasp of his origin and all his intuition of his destiny is hidden and revealed in this mystery of God's love for us and His merciful condescension to our fallen state.

The fact that we are now entering a new dark age, as our civilisation becomes increasingly demented and detached from the divine reality, makes what we do here all the more significant. Like the little embattled settlements of our forebears, we are called to keep the flame burning in the sanctuary and to remember, remember, remember. To keep the Lord always before our eyes. To instruct our children and to be martyrs, witnesses to the truth in the midst of the prevailing political dislocation and social dementia.

Do this in memory of me.

Remember that this is who we are.

Remember that this is where all men belong- penitent, reconciled, in the Presence of the Lord.

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