



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **Easter Vigil Year B**

### ***The Holy Fire***

*Readings: Genesis 1:1-2:2, Ps 103, Genesis 22:1-18, Ps 15, Exodus 14:15-15:1, Exodus 15:1-6, 17-18, Isaiah 54:5-14, Ps 29, Isaiah 55:1-11, Ps 12, Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4, Ps 18, Ezekiel 36:16-28, Pss 41, 42, Romans 6:3-11, Ps 117, Mark 16:1-7*

If you asked most people to recall a picture by Holman Hunt, if they had even the slightest knowledge of Victorian art, they would, almost certainly describe 'Behold I stand at the door and knock'. Moving though this undoubtedly is, I have a sneaking preference for his 'Miracle of the Holy Fire' painting of the annual Easter miracle at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The Greek Orthodox hierarchy, for they have care of this holy site, enter the tomb, in the presence of thousands of worshippers crammed to the rafters, bearing the unlit candle. The prayers of the faithful burgeon in intensity until, several minutes later, the priests emerge with the holy fire, the result of spontaneous combustion, to the roars and acclamations of the faithful. The light travels, as at our vigil, from hand to hand, across the holy site until the whole arena is ablaze with fire. Holman Hunt's picture catches the excitement, expectancy, turbulence and holy chaos at the very moment of the emerging fire. There is a tangible desire emanating from the picture and an urgent haste in the passing on of the

miraculous fire, the symbol both of the Risen Lord and the dynamic that will both birth and transform the little Church of the Pentecost a few weeks hence.

Sceptics, over the centuries, have attributed the miracle severally to Naphtha, the delayed action of secreted phosphorus or the Archimandrite with a box of matches.

I am a simple soul and I am happy to go with the miracle until I find a Zippo in the curate's cassock.

What matters is the sign. What this miracle and Hunt's great picture tell us and remind us is that the truth of Easter must catch fire in the hearts of men. The truth of Easter is a source of explosive joy. The truth of Easter must be passed on urgently hand to hand, person to person. The excitement that engulfs the Tomb must engulf the entire apostolic body.

Tonight, once again and here, we celebrate the miracle of the Holy Fire.

Tonight I am here by gracious invitation of Fr. Peter and your community because a very old friend of mine is being welcomed home and given me the privilege of putting my hand on his shoulder as he is received and anointed.

I am doubly delighted because he is an evangelical and, if I may presume, there are two things that have become clear to me since my own conversion.

Evangelicals love Jesus but don't really know the Church. Catholics love the Church but often don't know how to share the love of Jesus.

Put simply.....we need each other.

Pray for more evangelicals to help us with the New Evangelisation. We can welcome them into the family of heaven and earth and let them experience the motherhood of Holy Church and Our Lady. They can teach us how to grab that Holy Fire and get out into the streets.

We need each other.

The Vigil Mass reminds us of the Miracle of the Holy Fire. It reminds us that we are not a club. We are not an organisation just to keep a flame burning. We are sent out to set the world on fire.

Our mission work is rough, untidy, sometimes embarrassing. Like the sower we scatter much and some falls on stone, some fails to root, some is snatched by Satan BUT we go on because some will fall on good ground. The Sower is not daunted by failure but profligate in his generosity. At the judgement we will not be asked, 'Were you successful?' but 'Were you faithful?'

The great missionary, St. Paul, entered strange cities. In some he was lionised, in others stoned, flogged or thrown over the wall. He went on because of the miracle of the Holy Fire of this night, the miracle represented by the Paschal Candle that both marks our arrival and our

departing. He proclaimed, as we must, not just a message but a living reality. That reality is known to each one of us.

Man, steeped in sin and doomed to die is exiled from Eden and his destiny in the Paradise of God.

God has reached out to us in Christ, lived our life, taken our sins and nailed them to the tree of Calvary. The tree of death has become, mystery upon mystery, the Tree of Life, reversed Eden and opened the way home. Christ has harrowed Hell and defeated death.

In the miracle of the Third Day Christ Jesus, the Risen Lord, has transfigured our failing humanity by His divinity, transformed our fragile mortality into His immortality and translated our little time into His eternity. This is the mystery we celebrate every Sunday.

On this Sabbath, above all Sabbaths, we celebrate the homecoming of our brothers and sisters being received, welcomed into the universal and eternal family of the Catholic Church AND we celebrate and remember the welcome home that God has given to each one of us in Christ.

Together, bearing the Holy Fire, we are to joyfully hand on this wonderful news of God's love and mercy to those who, as yet, have not found their way to Jesus and whose destiny needs His redemption. In Christ - Death has no dominion. X is Risen Hallelujah.