



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Advent - Year C

My friend

Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16, Ps 24, 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2, Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

When I was a little boy one of my favourite singers was Francesco Paolo Lovecchio, better known in Tin Pan Alley as 'Old Leather Lungs' or Frankie Laine. For older punters you may recall him belting out the theme to 'Rawhide'. He grew up in the Windy City in Little Italy and his dad was personal barber to Al Capone. Young Frankie was not unfamiliar with Catholic themes and could tune his tonsils to a religious ballad with the best of them. You may recall, 'I believe' (for every drop of rain a flower grows) and, more pertinently for Advent, 'My Friend' which I used to delight in singing *Fortissimo* for my grandmother.

This simple song contains within it the great paradox at the heart of the Christian proclamation and encompasses the twin foci of the Advent season. Let me take it from the top....

**My friend
Is the king of all kings
And yet my friend walks beside me
My friend
Rules the earth and the sun
And yet my friend stops to guide me**

There is more but I'm not one to milk an encore.

The great season Advent hangs between the anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ and the long and winding road of salvation history rehearsed in Holy Scripture and realised in the kitchen at Nazareth and in the cattle shed of Bethlehem, the incarnation of the Eternal Word in Jesus Christ.

So it reminds us of both the transcendence of God and His immanence. We are given great apocalyptic passages to retrain our eyes on the immensity of the Creator and giver of life. We are shocked and humbled and overwhelmed and grateful again to know that this same Almighty God has chosen to submit Himself to the constraints of our flesh and blood and walk the dusty road of our humanity with us.

So the Christian Faith lives in this tension between the utter otherness, purity, holiness, unapproachable light of the Godhead and the real, tangible, personal Presence of the Incarnate Lord, Jesus.

Go to one extreme – the distant, terrifying godhead – you topple over into mechanistic Deism, a careless creator who has wound up a clockwork universe and walked away OR a legalistic monotheism where a true relationship is inconceivable and all that matters is submission to the iron laws of fate and the will of a divine tyrant whose mercy is arbitrary and whose judgement is certain.

Go to the other extreme and you descend to a trivialised immanence. God Almighty becomes God All-Matey, a god best worshipped in nursery rhymes and a suspension of disbelief. This reduces the Saviour of the

world to a good, likeable chap doing his best, in trying cultural circumstances, to be nice to everybody. Needless to say this results in a highly mobile theology of the 'If Jesus were alive today He would agree with me' variety. It has proved a recipe for flight from the Faith.

Such supermarket spirituality and pick and mix morality don't cut it.

The miracle of the Christian proclamation is that it comprehends the immensity and magnificence of God. It rightly understands the nature of His creation and His making Man in His own image. It has a grasp of the necessary involvement of this One true God in human history. It understands God's desire to save His fallen sin –strapped and death-bound creatures, not by magic but by engagement and relationship. AND it dares to recognise that this profound divine love is manifest in the Incarnation and at the Calvary. God humbles Himself to become 'one of us' and sacrifices Himself for us because no other sacrifice can make us holy and fit for eternity.

If Jesus is not fully Man, He cannot represent us.

If Jesus is not fully God, He cannot save us.

Only by being both can He defeat sin and death and translate our little humanity into divinity and into forever.

So, when we come to Mass we kneel before the great creator of all worlds.

And when we come to Mass we receive in our hands the Body entrusted, at Bethlehem and at Calvary, into the loving arms of Our Lady,

Mother of the Church. It is BOTH...AND. Transcendent and Immanent.

God of God, Light of Light. No other Faith has such a wonderful understanding of the divine nature or His loving purposes for us frail

mortals.

So, when the Son of God, the Son of Mary, comes again in glory He exhorts us not to fear but to lift up our heads in joyful anticipation.

Those who have loved Jesus in this life need not fear His coming.

**My friend tells me life is a road
And though it ends
At the bending
My friend
Tells then there's a road beyond this road
That is unending**

**Some day when I walk up the happy road that lies
Around the bend
Who will there be
To welcome me
My friend.**

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