



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **Christmas Midnight Mass – Years A, B, C**

### ***Proclaim the Good News***

*Readings: Isaiah 9: 1-7, Ps 9, Titus 2: 11-14, Luke 2: 1-14*

I was once given the care of a parish on the outskirts of London, with a population of 11,000, which contained a large Jewish population. The Orthodox synagogue had a roll of about 800 families and huge regular Sabbath attendance. The Church I inherited, on the opposite corner, had a Sunday congregation of 60.

As I was unpacking my bags a large glossy publication landed on my doormat. It was the Synagogue monthly magazine. The opening article was by the Rabbi and it warned his flock of the dangers of Christian evangelists. I had no idea he knew me that well.

When I had unpacked I made a first priority of contacting him. We chatted and I asked him if he would mind if we talked about the article. I explained that 'Yes', I am an evangelist. But I had a problem.

You see out of the 11000 souls in my patch, excluding the Jews, there were about 8,000 gentiles who never worshipped the one true God at all.

Given the fact that he had most of the rest attending worship on some sort of regular basis, would he mind if I gave my immediate evangelistic priority

to those Gentiles who did not know their need of God at all. It was, he reflected wittily, a form of discrimination he could live with and we have remained lifelong friends.

That does not mean that we never talked with Jewish friends about Jesus, indeed the subject often came up and over the years a small number came. But the Rabbi put in his article a very telling sentence and one I have never forgotten. It said this: 'If a Christian tells you that he is not an evangelist there are two possibilities. He is either a bad liar or a bad Christian'. It stuck because the Rabbi understood how fundamental to the life of the Church the Mission is.

We come to Mass to be fed with the bread of Heaven **in order** to go out to the world to tell people about Jesus and bring them home. We pray to bring the troubled world to the feet of Christ and then, through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, we go out to do something about it.

Today, on the great Feast of the Nativity, the moment when the Incarnation of God is finally revealed to Man and we rejoice with the angels and archangels, we are given a reminder of that joyful duty.

The reminder is the Shepherds.

They are humble men from the poorest section of society. Their job is cold, lonely, difficult and dangerous. Yet it is as a Shepherd of His people that God identifies himself in the Old Testament. It is through the shepherd David that God establishes the great line which will bring forth the Messiah. It is as Shepherd that Jesus will identify Himself and the Church will represent Him in its earliest devotional art.

There are a dozen homilies here (hundreds if you are St. Augustine).  
But this morning, on this joyful and glorious day, I want you to notice just this – the pattern of our Christian lives is actually given to us in the response of the Shepherds of Bethlehem:

- 1) They hear the Good News – the Saviour of the world is come – Jesus.
- 2) In obedience and excitement they go to the stable and kneel before the Lord.
- 3) They tell everyone around them about Jesus.

It has remained the pattern of the Church, the pattern of Evangelism ever since. We hear the most exciting news the world will ever know. We come to kneel before the Child in the arms of Mary. We cannot help but share it with the world.

Today at home we will, no doubt, receive many gifts. Most will be soon forgotten. Today in Bethlehem we have been given the gift that lasts forever. And the secret is, the secret that is at the heart of the Church, that the more we give that gift to others the more we will have of it and the greater will be our joy.

Hear the Word

Adore the Lord

Tell the world.

Before you rush home today, pause before the crib, light a candle, join the shepherds, kneel before the Babe in the arms of Mary.

With the shepherds offer your heart to Jesus and pray for the courage and opportunity this Christmas to tell someone else, very simply, what Jesus means to you.

© 2015 Fowey Retreat