



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Ascension of the Lord – Year C

Continuity and identity

Readings: Acts 1: 1-11, Ps 46, Ephesians 1: 17-23, Luke 24: 46-53

As one gets older the frailty of the flesh becomes more apparent, the inevitable consequence of our mortality more stark. We begin to comprehend all the things that worked so seamlessly and without thought, in our youth, beginning to creak and display a frightening interdependence of body, mind and soul. All that we had taken for granted in the seamless robe of our humanity begins to fray at the edges.

Yet for all the bleakness of our frail flesh, we live in the Easter Season and rejoice in the future promise of restoration and glory. For Christians the body has always had a special place. We do not reject it like those philosophies which see it as a prison for the soul. Neither do we punish it by indulgence or degrade it by excess. We see it go, 'dust to dust', yet we believe in its future.

We do not look forward, with the Vikings, to a post mortem party in the Halls of the Dead, drunk as skunks and twice as unpleasant.

Nor do we expect to be in the Islamic version where male believers are surrounded by gazelle eyed houris and ageless boys while quaffing sherbets that don't lead to a hangover. (Come to think of it that sounds quite a good deal, fellahs!)

We do not share the far eastern notion of soul-slip, reincarnation, becoming someone else on an endless merry go round of mortality ending in nothingness or the reintegration into some cosmic spiritual soup.

We can, on one hand, make preparation for the reverent disposal of our remains and, on the other, agree with St. Monica, 'I do not care where you lay my body so long as you pray for my soul at the altar.'

We know that the Martyrs of Lyons, tortured, murdered, cremated and scattered by their persecutors are no less likely to share the Resurrection than any other believer for God is Lord of Time and Space, all that is or was or will be. For the Creator of all things, reconstitution and transformation are not beyond His infinite power.

So Christians take the life of the body very seriously, partly because it is a gift of God but not least because God Himself deigned to dwell in the fragile humanity in His Incarnation in Jesus Christ Our Lord. That Incarnational intervention reaches its final point of revelation in this great Feast of the Ascension.

The God-dwelt flesh and blood of Man has been taken into death and raised up by the Divine Life. The Body is the same one that bears the wounds of nails and spear but now bi-locates. It is a body that can dine at the beach barbeque on Galilee and yet appear behind locked doors. It is a body that can walk the Emmaus Road yet only be recognised in the breaking of the bread. The Divinity has restored humanity. There is complete continuity yet radical transformation.

So here, on the Bethany Road there is a further claim on the future. Here the Risen Christ ascends to the Heavens. In so doing He is taking that risen body, that transformed humanity with Him into the eternal Godhead. It is the final revelation that Man's future can be eternal if only he is in Christ. There is no other certainty.

It is a supreme statement by the Word of God made flesh that there is intended to be continuity between this life and the life to come. The radical discontinuity of death may remain the lot of sinful Man but its consequence has been abolished in the Risen Lord and all who claim Him as their Saviour.

We see in the climactic event of these post-Easter 40 days both absolute continuity and radical transformation. It will be the same for us. We remain who we are and yet, by the power of the Risen One, we are becoming who He originally intended us to be. That continuity is unbroken by death. That transformation may take us through the purification that succeeds our dying. We are who we are yet so much more is to come. It is in this continuity that lies our hope of reunion with

those we love and all the saints of God who are in Christ. Part of that continuity is our identity. We are the person God made us. We do not switch identity or become someone else. The Christian Faith affirms the integrity of Man, body and soul.

And this has eternal consequence for the Christian Faith asserts the vitality of the relationship between God and Man. Relationship depends on personhood. God honours the person. God in Christ died for that person. God loves that person. Relationships are only possible between real people. The Ascension of Christ affirms the continuity and identity of mortal Man and his individual and corporate relationship with God in Christ.

There can be no higher vision of Man than this. Taken into God we are called to be raised and transformed by and into His divinity and eternity. That mystery is revealed to us between the Upper Room, the Via Dolorosa and the Bethany Road. It is in the heart of the Mass.

No wonder we are a people whose song is 'Hallelujah'.

© 2013 Fowey Retreat