



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Advent Year B

Place your trust in the Risen One

Readings: Isaiah 63: 16-17; 64: 1, 3-8, Ps 79, 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9, Mark 13: 33-37

We all know the old truism. The only certainties in life are death and taxes. That is, of course, only half true. Those who have been shocked by the leaking of, what are dubbed for shorthand, 'The Paradise Papers' will have come to realise what most of us have known for ages. Ordinary people pay taxes. Rich people pay lawyers and accountants. The only certainty is death.

This came flooding back to me last month while watching the television. There, before the cameras, was my old school buddy. We used to sit together in A-level history and play tennis on Wednesday afternoons out of the rugby season. We last met on our final day at Cambridge in 1973. I went on to climb the dizzy heights of assistant curate of Bodmin. He became Chairman of the Cayman Island Stock Exchange, one of the world's shrewdest lawyers and an OBE for his services to Financial Services. Tony had lost none of his sharpness and was patiently correcting a poorly briefed BBC interviewer who did not appear to know the difference between Avoidance and Evasion. One is legal. The other is not. It was an unequal contest.

One of the best ways to avoid tax is, I'm not telling you any secrets here, is to set up Trusts. This is of little use to the average Joe on PAYE. You need to have the money to save the money and go offshore etc, etc. But Trusts are the key. You can avoid tax but not evade it.

With Death, of course, it is the other way round. You can evade it but you can't avoid it. Eye watering sums of the NHS go to assist us elderly coffin-dodgers to do just that and we are grateful. The reality is that it is only a temporary delay.

For Christians Advent is the traditional time when we consider the Four Last Things – Death, Judgement, Hell and Heaven. We reflect on our mortality. We look ahead to the moment when our mortal remains are boxed up on trestles in the nave, the Word of God opened on its lid and the Cross of Christ proclaiming our only hope.

There are two fundamental ways of viewing this apparently terminal event. Religious or Materialist. The choice between these two warring beliefs will have dictated the way each person lives their life and views their dying.

For the materialist, a tiny minority in human history but the current preferred option of our Western European 'post-truth' society, it is the end. The agglomeration of molecules will disintegrate and personhood is finished in all but the brief and decaying memory of the survivors. If that were it, it would be bad enough as a reduction of our humanity. But the consequences of materialism are much more significant. Stripped of

the ultimate worth of Man as created in God's image and heir to an eternal destiny, all things are devalued thereby.

Reduced to the elements of matter and energy Kindness becomes unreasonable sentimentality, Compassion a chemical response. Philanthropy, in Social Darwinism, is but disguised self-interest. Love is merely the glamorous wrapping for gene survival. (Makes you glad to be alive!) It is the endorsement of such terrifying devaluation of the reality of our humanity that leads societies at once to the rot of hedonism – it doesn't matter what I do with my body, temporary gratification is all there is- to the cataclysm of militant atheism – it doesn't matter what I do to other people's bodies, from the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, the disciples of Mao, the Gulags of Stalin to the eight million dead in the abattoirs of modern Britain. Materialism is the road to degeneration and mass murder.

On the other side is the religious option. Man made in the image of God. Man with a life that is sacred by virtue of its divine gift. Man with an eternal destiny. Man with a hope of glory. Man transformed by God's love for him, all unworthy though he be. Man capable of a love of other that is truly and, in human terms, unreasonably sacrificial. It is an altogether different vision. Our task, as followers of Christ, is to live out that vision in our own lives. More than that it is, by our evangelisation, our task to help others make the choice that their created instincts, implanted by God, draw them to - and away from the dreary culture of death into which they have been born. To reconnect them to their origin and their intended end.

So we ponder our mortality in Advent. We have made our choice. Like non-believers we too will die. But there is more to it than that. There is a way of avoiding eternal death and, to return to my opening image, it is a matter of trust. The avoidance of taxes depends on trusts. The avoidance of eternal death depends on the One in whom we have placed our trust, that is the Risen One, the One in whom our life is hidden and will be revealed in eternity. As we live for Him so we may confidently die in Him. We rejoice at His coming. We look forward to His coming again.

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