



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday of Lent Year B

Sir, we would like to see Jesus

Readings: Jeremiah 31: 31-34, Ps 50, Hebrews 5: 7-9, John 12: 20-30

In the little chapel at Fowey Retreat, on the windowsill facing down the fields to the sea is a little plain Cross on a plinth of three narrow steps. It was carved from the ancient timbers of the old church, where I served for 15 years, which had been ripped out by an aesthetically challenged predecessor of mine who was in love with architectural brutalism. The carver was a saintly old warden who gave it to me on my arrival. On the three steps up to the Cross are the words, *God...So...Loved*. It has travelled with me ever since.

You are probably thinking I have got my weeks wrong. That was last week's text. I haven't. I just want you to notice that this week's Gospel text begins to spell out the impending revelation of that earlier proclaimed truth.

We are not far now from the Calvary Road and Philip comes to Jesus. He has been approached by some Greeks with a simple request. *'Sir, we would like to see Jesus'*.

It is an evangelist's dream. People wanting to know. How envious we, who are exhorted to New Evangelisation are of Philip's fortune here. Here are know nothings, outsiders, who want to meet Jesus.

We, who live surrounded by a culture of fashionable atheism, decadent nihilism, idolatrous materialism and post modern relativism would, we tell ourselves, give our right arms for such an opening.

We are not, in some respects, too different from Philip. He seems genuinely puzzled by the request to bring these outsiders to Jesus. 'What shall I do, Lord? How shall I do it?'

Jesus' response is apparently disproportionate. It is, He says, a moment of glorification. He understands what Philip does not. That this is the moment when the mission to the gentiles begins. This is the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham that, in his seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This is the moment prefigured by the arrival of the Wise Men from eastern lands afar. This is the moment which will be ratified by Peter and James at the Council of Jerusalem when the Jewish sect of the Way becomes aware that it is the Universal Church of God. These few enquirers were the first shoots of what was to be – a Catholicity only imaginable in retrospect.

We live in a society which is, for the most part indifferent to its eternal destiny. It is economically comfortable – for all the self-pitying twaddle of 'recession'. (We are rich as Croesus compared with most of mankind and most of Man's history.) Its cultural outlets advertise, as its philosophy, the contempt of Dawkins, the bile of the late (and ironically named)

Christopher Hitchens and the noxious spume of the ubiquitous Stephen Fry – men whose cleverness has deceived them and turned them into ranting fundamentalists.

Amidst all this most have never met Jesus or seen a reason to seek Him. The Universal Church they regard, at best, as well meaning inadequates, at worst as a bizarre outmoded sect of killjoys with counter cultural rules.

Jesus sees the meeting with the outsiders, the know nothing, as the beginning of glorification. He points to the Cross that awaits. He points to His being 'lifted up' – very different from earthly glory. He signals the mark that will seal the faithful down all the millennia. He looks forward to the moment when the new and final Passover will be ratified by the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God, whose blood will turn away the Angel of Death. He anticipates the sacrifice, the final making holy, the reconciliation of fallen man. This is the Cross – heresy to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks, as Paul says, but the heart of all Christian preaching and evangelism. It is the *mysterium* at the heart of the Faith. It is written on that little hand carved wooden cross in the Fowey Chapel.
God so loved...

Being Himself, Ipsum Esse, I am who I am, God, the origin and end of all that is, in whose image we were made, has reached from eternity into time, poured His divinity into our humanity with such love that the barrier of sin has been broken down, the force of non-being has been defeated *in aeternam* by the transcendent power of His irresistible and eternal life.

The atheist's tragedy is that he stops at Ash Wednesday – 'Remember O Man that thou art dust and unto dust shalt thou return.'

The believer takes the long road through the wilderness, accompanied by the Holy One, becoming the People of God. The believer walks the Via Dolorosa to the Calvary. Then he will kneel before the Cross and understand the amazing love of God, open his heart to that mercy and pledge himself to the Sacrifice of Christ, the new and eternal covenant. Only in so doing will he enter the miracle of the Third Day.

Brothers and sisters, the aim of our Lenten journey is partly to make it easier for others to see Jesus and to make us more eager to introduce them, in a culture in love with the death cult of materialism, to the fullness of life in Him.

Our spiritual exercises this week:

Half an hour before the Cross with the simple invocation, 'God so loved'.

Pray for the opportunity to help someone come and see Jesus.

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