



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday of Easter - Year B

I am the True Vine

Readings: Acts 9: 29-31, Ps 21, 1 John 3: 18-24, John 15: 1-8

Tuesday last saw me out at the beautiful riverside church of St. Winnow for the funeral of an Anglican friend. The place was packed with my fellow local Lostwithiel folk. Imagine my surprise when three people in a row approached me with exactly the same greeting: *'Good afternoon, Father, we haven't seen you in the pub lately.'*

The surprise was compounded by the fact that I rarely go the pub, once a month at most, and then only to join 'The Lost Boys' – a tiny group of local Catholic friends - to talk about theology and down a couple of pints of Newcastle Brown. I mumbled a diplomatic reply that it was 'nice to be missed'.

This got me thinking about drink. I probably drink two glasses of wine a week. This grows during my annual sojourn in Rome when the 'off Campo de Fiore' ambience of Massimo's Wine Bar and the delight of Montefalco's impeccable Rosso sees an inevitable, but not exponential, growth in consumption.

This scarcely makes me a devotee of Bacchus. I would certainly find the traditional Bacchanal accompaniment of goat-footed Satyrs and wild ecstatic women tiresome in about equal measure. Nor has it ever been my experience that the old saw 'In vino veritas' (In wine – the Truth) carries much conviction. The long end of the glass usually tends either to irrational sentimentality and drivelling inarticulacy or worse to volcanic belligerence and unintended consequence. In addition unlikely members of the opposite sex become, in Naval parlance, 'Eight pints beautiful'. Truth is usually the first casualty of inebriation.

Nevertheless the Christian, unless there are medical or addictive repercussions, is not a teetotaler. Christ blesses 150 + gallons of the stuff at Cana. The Disciples share the Passover Cup. St Paul encourages us to 'take a glass' for our stomach's sake. The prophet Isaiah pictures the kingdom of God as an enormous banquet with the finest wines.

In today's Gospel the Lord Himself rejoices in the image of the Vine, the source of the celebration. He identifies the Divine Name, the 'I AM', with this simple symbol of heartsease and joy and family table fellowship. Indeed He sees our discipleship as integrally linked to this powerful life force. Only by connection to the Vine can we bear the fruit that will lead to the celebration. Disconnected we are but dry sticks for the burning. As branches we are infused with the rising life of the divine. In fruiting our gifts will be transformed into the wine of the offering. That offering on the 'altering' stone of sacrifice will be transformed into the Blood of Christ.

That Blood is the life of the Church. That Blood is our inebriation in Christ. That Blood is the common bond of our Communion throughout the world and across time. We are a transcendently connected people.

That Blood transforms my blood type from O for Ordinary to A and O for Alpha and Omega, the divine bloodline with which we, as little brothers and sisters of Christ, are infused and thereby transformed eternally.

It is what the priest hints at when he prays at the offertory: *'Blessed are you Lord God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.'*

Even more explicit are the words of the old rite: *'Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti...'* "O God who wonderfully formed the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it grant us through the mystery of this water and wine *to be made participants of his divinity who condescended to become a partaker of our humanity* Jesus Christ Our Lord...'

Here alone the old proverb finds its justification. In Vino Veritas.

Hidden in the mystery of this wine is the final revelation of the truth of God. The transformed offerings of the fruit of our discipleship is mingled with the Precious Blood of the Sacrifice of Christ. We celebrate an immortal destiny. In this, the Vine of the Divine Life, we are an eternally connected people. It is in the metamorphosis of the Mass that we make the journey from creatures of earth to the children of God.