



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Epiphany of the Lord-January 6<sup>th</sup> 2019-Bodmin

***Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6, Psalm 71, Ephesians 3: 2-3 5-6,  
Matthew 2: 1-12***

'I close my eyes, then I drift away  
Into the magic night, I softly say  
A silent prayer like dreamers do  
Then I fall asleep to dreams, my dreams of you  
  
In dreams I walk with you, in dreams I talk to you  
In dreams you're mine, all of the time  
We're together in dreams, in dreams'

The Big 'O', Roy Orbison, from one of his beautiful, haunting and impossibly high ballads. Popular song is littered with the fantasy world of the boy/girl of my dreams, the big 'what ifs' and the sad 'if onlys'. The phrase 'in your dreams' is a synonym for the impossible. It marks out the stark difference between tangible reality and the imaginary playground of the heart.

Dreams were not always so sentimentally regarded or so summarily dismissed. In Holy Scripture dream plays a significant part in various critical salvation events. In the last century dreams were reinstated, in a

secular understanding, by the leading proponents of the psychoanalytic movement, Freud and Jung – in the first instance as a key to the primary sexual preoccupations of aberrant patients. In Jung's case with a much wider, almost mystical, focus on the nature of the unconscious. Now, in its secular form, and with our self-regarding obsessions, psychology has become the supposed key to almost everything human and is one of the most popular courses at British universities.

The problem, for the Christian, is not that he rejects Psychology/Psychiatry/Psychoanalysis/Psychotherapy and the whole Psyche industry – rather that he sees it in its original context and meaning. Psyche is the soul and you cannot secularise that God-given reality out of the equation. It is the very quintessence. Christian understanding is informed by Holy Scripture and the long story of God's interaction with His creature Man. It is our memory of Paradise and our vision of the Heavenly City that informs our journey and haunts our dreams.

Today's Gospel of the Epiphany, the manifestation of God in Christ to the Magi, is ringed around with dream. The Holy Family are only there because Joseph has taken Mary as his wife. He has only overcome the scandal of the circumstances because of an angelic appearance to him 'in a dream'. The Magi do not return to Herod to tell the monomaniac king where to find the infant king because of a warning in dream. Joseph only knows to flee to Egypt because of an angelic dream. He only knows when, years later, it is safe to return by the same angelic vision of the night. Like his great namesake of the Old Testament, Joseph is the dreamer of dreams that guard and deliver salvation to his people.

Joseph, the Pharaoh, the baker, the butler, Jacob, Abimelech, Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar, Gideon, Daniel, right through to St. John on Patmos and the close of the Canon of Scripture, dream is significant.

The fall of empires, the salvation of the world, the calling of God's people are all delineated in dreams. But dreams must be discerned, understood, interpreted aright. The Old Testament takes this for granted. It warns against false dreams that speak contrary to the revelation of God. But it is understood too as a normal way of encountering ultimate reality. Prophetic witness and dream discernment were often mentioned in the same breath.

We all dream. Some of us never recall these night excursions. For others they are as real and intense as any waking moment. They are a playground of the soul. They are the place where the overstretched conscious takes out its garbage. It is also the place where the mind tries to make sense of the enigmas of human existence, from the utterly trivial to the overwhelming.

We move across a vast canvas encountering the known and the unknown in different forms and contexts. Time is suspended. Physical limitations are left behind. We mix freely with the dead and the living, revisiting old haunts, strangely changed but nonetheless recognisable, replay the joys of days past and pouring balm upon old injuries, long buried but not quite healed. Occasionally we are given a glimpse of the future. There is an intensity to these experiences that do not belong to the rush of daytime but rather belong to the freedom of the reflective resting of the soul.

What are we to make of all this in the daily context of our Christian pilgrimage? We may not be people to whom God imparts great mysteries in dream but we should pay attention nonetheless to what we see and hear. Amidst all the clutter and chaos and excitement of the mind unleashed in the playground of the soul, we should listen for the notification of the people we need to pray for, the bridges we need to

rebuild, the areas into which we still need to invite the healing power of Christ and give thanks for the glimpses of what is to be and of the transcendent reality of which our earthbound existence is but a tiny part.

In dream, like Jacob, we see the ladder that links Heaven and Earth, the ladder on which the angels of God ascend and descend, which is the Jesus the Christ. That dream has become reality in the Babe in the arms of Mary and we, with the Magi, starbound and angel driven, are heading out from Bethlehem to tell the story of salvation, the glorious hope and final dream of Man.