



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

15th Sunday Year C

Christ Jesus is the image of the unseen God

Readings: Deuteronomy 30: 10-14, Ps 68, Colossians 1: 15-20, Luke 10: 25-37

Now that the days are shortening and the nights are drawing in I thought I had better remind you that there are only approximately twenty shopping weeks to Christmas.

I was only led to this cheering thought by today's epistle reading which, effectively, gives us Christmas in July. In so doing, of course, the Church is being generous to us. She understands that, nearer the time, our preoccupations will be on resolving the more difficult members of our gift list, hastily sending cards to people we thought had dropped off the list yet have just plopped an unwelcome greeting onto our doormat, ransacking the cupboards for tea towels, tinsel and festive accoutrements for the school nativity and searching for goose fat and whatever Delia has mandated for this year's seasonal 'must'.

So, it's Christmas in July and this time courtesy of St. Paul.

'Christ Jesus is the image of the unseen God and the first born of all creation, for in Him were created all things in Heaven and on Earth.'

Before we can understand the significance of the babe in the arms of Mary, before we can kneel in the stable with shepherds or the Magi, before we can

grasp the implication of this star studded, angel hymned moment of human history and its implications for our eternal destiny, we have to know who is being incarnated, *homo factus est*, who is being made Man.

The two great statements which answer that question are to be found in the Last Gospel, the Prologue of John (1 v 1-14), the Christmas Gospel..

'In the beginning was the Word..' and here today in St. Paul's letter to the little church at Colossae.

If you ask people about Jesus there will be a variety of opinions.

A Muslim will say that Jesus is a great prophet. A Jew would most likely think of Him as a delinquent rabbi. An agnostic might think He was a good man and little more.

A Christian holds that Jesus is God. A Christian does that because that is what Jesus Himself claims in the great 'I AM' statements (I am the Vine, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth, the Life etc.) where He identifies Himself with the Divine Name given to Moses by God from the bush of fire in Exodus Ch. 3.

It is also what Jesus tells St. Philip when Philip asks to see God the Father in John Ch.14. Jesus replies, *'He who has seen me has seen the Father.'*

Here St. Paul underlines this revelation in a majestic hymn of adoration and recognition: ***Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God.*** In Christ we are able to see the unseeable God, to know the unknowable creator of all. Jesus Christ is the enfleshment of the very power that brought all things into being, God's eternal Word that created the universes and all that we see and cannot see.

Christ, as the Son of the Father, the Second Person of the Trinity, existed before all things. All things were brought into being by Him and for Him. Christ, the Eternal Word, is the One who holds all things together. He is the key to their creation and their reconciliation. He is the only but stupendous hope of a fallen world. God involves Himself absolutely in His creation in order to redeem it. God becomes Man to restore us to our eternal destiny. This Christ is, St. Paul affirms, not only all this and more but He is Head of the Church. The Church is His Body.

This means, of course, that, as the Church, we are ourselves to be part of the work of salvation. It is why the Church is a missionary enterprise and not a self-help cosy club for the like minded. The Church is part of the reconciling work of God. The Church, being Christ's Body on earth, is directly linked to His divine life, directed by His divine wisdom, heirs to His Resurrection, at peace with the Father through the sacrifice of His Cross. We are that Church. That is our calling.

This God, who has created all and deigned to dwell among us, promises His Presence with us to the ages of ages and to be here feeding and sustaining us with His divine life at the altar of the sacrifice, at the table of the heavenly fellowship, in His Body and Blood at the Mass.

We eat and drink of and with the Eternal One and we take that news, that invitation out to a lost and wandering and muddled and starving world. We seek the reconciliation and reunification of all men and all things in Christ. That is the mission and ministry of the Church.

If Christ Jesus were not God then none of this would be possible. That is why our proclamation is so fundamental. That is why both St. Paul and St. John

hammer home the central message. Christ is, to quote the old hymn, 'God in Man made manifest'.

Jesus tells Philip, 'To have seen me is to have seen the Father.' We are not going to replicate this perfectly but there ought to be something about us, His followers, that reminds people of Jesus and draws them to His Body, the Church.

And when we go about our daily mission in the world, keen to share His love and mercy, let us remember who we represent. We do not represent a good man doing his best in rather trying cultural circumstances in first century Israel. We do not represent a prophet with a rather shrewd take on the zeitgeist, the spirit of his age. We do not go out in the name of a posthumously successful religious leader with a peculiar spin on poverty and sin. We go in the name of Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, Son of God, Second Person of the Trinity, Eternal Word, Creator and Reconciler of all worlds.

Before we get round to tea towels and tinsel again may I take this opportunity of wishing you all a very happy and blessed Christmas, to be celebrated shortly on an altar near you.

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