



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent-Year A-December 8<sup>th</sup> 2019

***Readings: Isaiah 11: 1-10, Psalm 71, Romans 15: 4-9, Matthew 3: 1-12***

In the eccentric and electrifying person of John the Baptist, the great line of prophets reaches its apogee and its end. With this strange and powerful ascetic – robed in camel hair and living on a diet of locusts and wild honey- the great procession of proclaimers reaches the moment of final revelation.

Like Jeremiah, he is the child of a Judaeen vicarage. He becomes the first witness to the Presence at the Visitation. He became an outsider, a retreat to the early nomadic life of the People of God, a desert dweller. He was a man familiar with the baking emptiness and freezing nights of the Wilderness. The infinite blackness of the night sky radiated with the shimmering beauty of the unfolding cosmos was his bedroom ceiling. The wild beasts were his companions. His ear was attuned, not to the babel hubbub of men but to the thin silence of the Divine Word.

What is common to all the prophets is the name nabi . This word comes from the root word to 'bubble up'. It is an image of a fountainhead of the Spirit, an unstoppable and irrepressible flow of the divine power. It is what Jeremiah complains of – that even when he wanted to quit and never utter another word, he could not be silent when the Lord's Word came. It is the most common term for a declaration of the will of God. It

denotes the messenger, the one who must forthtell. A prophet is not a fortune teller, never a fatalist or determinist. When he proclaims God's Word then part of that is to outline the consequences of disobedience (and obedience). The determining factor is the will of Man. We can always, right to the very last, on that Cross next to Christ, choose mercy rather than judgement. The other words for prophet, though much rarer, are Roeh and Hozeh. Roeh is the gift of seeing, a visionary, one who is co-opted into the arcana of the mystery, a sight that transports the seer beyond the thin veil of physical sense.

The final term, Hozeh, is also used to describe a counsellor of the King, someone privy to the secrets of the Kingdom and in permanent proximity to the Majesty. He is often the interpreter of the word and will of the King to the people. Such are the threefold charisms of this ministry. I need hardly add that it is, necessarily, a very lonely ministry. No-one sane would volunteer for it because it is lonely, culturally isolated, politically unpopular and downright dangerous. Prophets seldom die in their beds.

But it is more than that which puts them at risk. They have to call for repentance. They have to call men back to God. They have, in the modern cliché, 'speak truth to power', and power is seldom grateful – whether it be our own individual autonomy or the great organs of the State. Telling people what they do not want to hear is a courageous act and it is inseparable from the prophetic ministry. When John calls the people back to God, they respond in their thousands. They have nothing to lose but their souls. The professional religious and the power brokers hold back. They fear any loss. They wait until John's call alienates him from the State by condemning royal adultery and wait for his all too brief flame to be snuffed out.

What is remarkable in John's ministry that, unlike the great prophets, he left not even a page of writing. Unlike Elijah or Elisha, there is no great core of narrative about his ministry. Of his teaching we know that he called for honesty and kindness. He said if you had two cloaks then give one to a poor man. If you were a soldier, don't abuse your power and authority. Scarcely remarkable and, in prophetic terms, not worth a row of beans.

Nonetheless he is the summit and end of all the prophets. Why?

He is a prophet because he proclaims the Word of God to a sinful and dysfunctional society. He is a prophet because he calls men back to God.

He is a prophet because he 'sees' and understands the urgency of the time. He is a prophet because he dwells in the counsels of the Most High and seeks to interpret the Divine Wisdom for the folly of Man.

He is the summit and summation of the prophets because he not only speaks the Word of God but, even unborn, rejoices in its Presence in the babe in the womb of Mary. He is the summit and summation of the prophets because he prepares the way for the coming of the Incarnate Word in Jesus.

He is the summit and summation of the prophets because he points to the Messiah, the final and consummate revelation of the Word of God, enfleshed in our humanity.

On the banks of the Jordan, at the height of his power and influence, he points out the sacrifice who will reconcile God and Man. 'Behold', he cries, pointing to the obscure Galilean, 'the Lamb of God'. At every Mass we echo that cry and our lives should bear witness to that encounter and that supreme truth. It is part of the Church's precious gift of Advent – to give us time to heed the forerunner and Prepare the Way of the Lord – in our hearts, in our homes, in our parish and in our land.

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