



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Christmas Vigil 2019

***Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 88, Acts 13: 16-17. 22-25,
Matthew 1: 1-25***

Forty years ago Clarissa Baldwin of the National Canine Defence League (now The Dogs' Trust) gave a new slogan to the world of charity advertising and to the bumper sticker industry. It read:

'A dog is for life – not just for Christmas'.

While it may have given some more reflective souls pause for thought, it does not stop the annual crisis of the dumping of pets in the New Year as the sentimental, cuddly, fluffy, feelgood gift of a puppy and its instant gratification value drifts into the reality that this creature needed financial input, feeding, regular exercise and causes completely predictable but unanticipated disruption to the household. The upshot being, all too often, that the much prized gift is abandoned or put down. Not such a merry Christmas for dogs.

The whole notion of our seasonal outbreak of generosity is predicated on the immense generosity of God in giving us the gift of His only Son, Jesus. To celebrate this we spend disproportionate amounts of time and money working out what an ever growing raft of people would like then nigh on bankrupting ourselves in the effort to satisfy this elusive conjecture. A few months later many of our carefully contrived efforts finds their way into the Charity Shops or next church raffle.

Before you settle down depressed thinking, 'Oh No. I make all this effort to get to Mass tonight and all we get is Mr. Scrooge.' Relax. It's much more important than that and moaning solves nothing.

We are here tonight because of that supreme gift of Jesus. The outpouring of God's love for us. The climax of the great story of Salvation History. The One who is from all eternity to all eternity. The One who made all worlds. The One who has deigned to dwell among us as Man – to share our humanity, our joys, our sorrows, our triumphs and our suffering, to undergo our human mortality, to die for us and, in so doing, conquer death and give to our feeble frames and fragile minds hope of immortality.

All this great mystery and majesty and glory lies before us in the arms of Mary.

As we approach the manger – as we kneel before the infant king – as we seek to join Mary and Joseph in showing our love for Jesus, we open our hearts to Him. He is the gift that never stops giving. He is Christmas. If we never received another gift we would be rich beyond compare. God's gift to us is Himself.

The question then is: What will we do with that gift?

Because tonight, by candlelight, snuggled up with family and friends, anticipating the feast, singing the well known songs in solidarity and nostalgia, we are just beginning. We have come to the stable, rough and raw as it is. Will we adore with the shepherds and take the good news into the town? Will we offer our gifts with the kings and leave changed men and women? Will we be there when the Holy Family, at sword point, take the refugee road? Will we be up for years of obscurity and patient hard work with family? Will we accompany the Christ on His mission and ministry in the world? Will we be ready to walk the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, and stand by Him on His Cross?

Will we be there on the Third Day in a mourning that is transformed into inexpressible joy and a confidence to live and die for Him?

These are the hidden questions of the manger. The simple sentimentality of tonight will, in the morning, lead us to the deeper truths of God's amazing gift.

To follow Him will be inconvenient. It will impact our comfortable routines. There will be a cost. We will need feeding. Sometimes we will mess up. We will have to take regular spiritual exercise.

This is why God gave us the Church – to help us together on the Way. The Mass, the Confessional, Prayer life, Bible Study, Care of each other, Supportive and joyful friendships. We are part of the Holy Family.

Let's not rejoice excitedly tonight with Jesus and then next week put a return sticker on Him or dump Him down the Charity Shop.

In short, brothers and sisters,

'GOD IS FOR LIFE NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS'