



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Maundy Thursday-April 9th 2020

***Readings: Exodus 12: 1-8. 11-14, Psalm 115, 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26,
John 13: 34***

Fifteen years ago I stood here, on that step, waiting to be anointed with the Oil of Chrism and received into the Catholic Church. It was the end of a very long journey home.

The priest who received me, on behalf of the bishop, Fr. Guy de Gaynesford, is a great teacher and became a dear friend. When my wife, Sara, and I first approached him about becoming Catholics – after thirty years serving in the Anglican Church, he was very conscious that some priests were not doing any preparation and just receiving, what my good late friend John Hilton cheekily dubbed, ‘Old Anglican Retreads’. I immediately put Fr. Guy’s mind at rest and said that we wanted no special treatment, would do the full course and wait our turn. Although we were convinced of our destination – no-one should sign a blank cheque. Thus began – and those of you who know Fr. Guy will understand exactly what this means – nine months of intense and joyful catechesis. The inevitable corollary was that we would have to wait nine months before receiving the Blessed Sacrament.

As an Anglican Minister I had celebrated Holy Communion as often as nine times a week in my church, schools, homes etc. I had not been

without the Sacraments for thirty years. How on earth would I cope with a Eucharistic fast?

This is the lot now of the laity of the Catholic Church – worshipping by internet link, praying in our homes, fasting involuntarily from the Blessed Sacrament. From my own experience of this discipline I want to suggest that there may be many unlooked for blessings in this unwanted and sudden deprivation.

A deprivation peculiarly painful on this very night when Jesus instituted the Mass, the source and summit of our Faith.

In our current desert we are acutely aware of our loss. Our sense of the profound need of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is suddenly intensified. Our searching for Jesus in the Word of God as we study our Bibles and draw on the feast of available teaching on the website, is a rekindling of the adventure of Faith.

Our loss of one another's company in physical terms, offset by the extraordinary network of love and support via our communications technology, reminds us how much we love and miss the tangible gathering of the family of faith. Every sense is heightened. Our hearts are stretched out with longing. Our prayers are intense. Our sense of mortality and the importance of salvation are our daily companions. Our desire to share this with family and friends grows.

These are not inconsiderable blessings and ones we must carry beyond the present crisis.

Tonight we celebrate the gift of the Mass. Tonight we give profound thanks for the promise that, as we step across the borderline between Heaven and Earth, as the priest invokes the Holy Spirit of God, so Christ truly manifests Himself here on the altar of sacrifice. We are in the Presence.

And here, before the altar, I have placed the chair and the bowl and the towel. Like the empty chair for Elijah at the Jewish Passover. But though you are not bodily present yet I will, as your priest, kneel – in persona

Christi – and you will place your weary much travelled feet in His hands and consent to be washed and be a part of Him and His millennia long band of disciples.

The Mass inaugurated, celebrated, the Mystery of the Sacred Body and Blood revealed – everything will be stripped away and we will be enveloped in the darkness of the night and asked to watch with Him one hour.

That is something we can all do. This year, set aside a silence in our homes and watch with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane for one hour and prepare for the road to Calvary where tonight's manifestation in the Mass reveals the terrible and glorious reality of the Passover sacrifice and the empty tomb becomes the gateway to the lost Paradise of God.