



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Corpus Christie-Year A-June 14th 2020

Readings: Deuteronomy 8: 2-3. 14-16, Psalm 147, 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17, John 6: 51-58

The High Priest of Israel, Eli, the one to whom the boy Samuel was entrusted, old, hugely fat and now blind, sat on his chair by the city gate awaiting the news of the fate of the nation. A morale damaging defeat by the Philistines had encouraged the old man to give permission for the Ark of the Covenant, the proof of God's Presence, to be carried into battle by his deeply corrupt sons.

When the messenger returned it was with the direst news possible. The battle was a rout. Eli's sons were dead and the Ark was now in the hands of the enemy. His ministry destroyed, his heirs slaughtered, the old man toppled backwards and broke his neck. His daughter in law, dying in childbirth as a widow, delivered a son and, with her dying breath, named him Ichabod – the glory has departed. It was one of the lowest points in the early history of Israel.

All was not peaches and cream however for the victorious Philistines. The acquisition of the Ark led to an outbreak of plague and the collapse of their pagan god, Dagon. The joy of triumph quickly changed to a hearty desire to be shot of the noxious box. There was something terminally dangerous about the God of Israel. After much consultation an offering was made to this strange and powerful God. The Philistines cast

gold models of the plague tumours and returned the ticking timebomb tabernacle to neutral territory complete with golden cancers. The neutrals didn't want it either. The Ark was not moved again for some twenty years. Not until David, now king and based in Jerusalem, went out to repatriate it. The lines in his Psalm (135) record simply, 'we found it in the wood at Ephrata in the Plains of Yearim.'

What David found there and brought in triumph back to his capital city was a box. Its contents were, by tradition and Scriptural record, threefold. First was the Tablets that Moses brought down the mountain inscribed with the Law of God. Second was Aaron's rod. Third was a jar of the Manna by which God has fed his people in the wilderness. These are significant because the Tablets represent the Word of God revealed. The rod of Aaron was the rod of power that had defeated the sorcerers of Egypt and blossomed in the hands of a true priest. The Manna was the viaticum, the miraculous daily bread that provided food for the journey. It is no accident that one of the most glorious titles of Our Lady is 'The Ark of the Covenant' for she contains the Word given by God, the Bread of Life and the definitive priesthood – all summed up in Christ.

Note also that this precious gift, while salvific for the penitent believer, is a real and present danger to those who oppose God as well as to those who take God for granted and don't think His laws apply to them.

I mention all this because we are in danger of forgetting the reality of the God with whom we have to do. The closure of our churches and the removal of the right to pray before the Presence mirrors the extreme response of a secular society. Religion is a fantasy and it doesn't add to the gaiety of nations. But Holy Scripture reminds us of the devastating effect of the absence on a disobedient nation and the glory of the return. If the Old Covenant speaks of the Ark of the Covenant, the physical presence of the reminders of the encounters with God and His liberating and sustaining power, how much more are we in worshipping awe of the Real Presence. Here is the Word contained in Our Lady.

Here is the sign of the High Priesthood of Christ, the overwhelming power of His authority against the rebel forces of the pagan darkness. Here is the mysterious Bread from Heaven by which, on this earthly journey, we are sustained and led onward to the Land of Promise and the Holy City. This is the divine transaction we proclaim on Corpus Christi. Let the Church always proclaim this power and let the nations never forget.