



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Requiem Mass for Frank Philip RIP-September 10th 2020

Readings: 2 Corinthians 4, Psalm 84, Luke 2

I was deeply touched when Fr. Ciaran rang me up to ask me to read the Gospel and preach at Frank's funeral. What Fr. Ciaran did not know was that Frank had played an important part in my life as a Catholic convert. When we arrived here at St Mary's, sixteen years ago, I had to get a sponsor for my reception and Chrismation – someone who would support me, encourage me, help me and pray for me. As I looked around the congregation, over the months of our family's preparation, I noticed this old boy who was always at prayer. He was there when you arrived, there when you went, never missed a Mass, travelled to all the churches to worship, even said his rosary on the bus. I began to suspect that he might actually live in the church. I was in no doubt that this was a man who would 'put in a shift' on my behalf before the throne of Grace. I invited Frank for tea and we talked about our lives. I asked him if he would carry me in prayer. He didn't think he was good enough, young enough, worthy etc etc. I had no doubt. I have had no doubt in the years since. He has carried me (and so many others) in prayer and I am more grateful than I can say.

One thing I discovered early was that Frank, like me, had putdown in his funeral arrangements, NO EULOGY !!!!!!! He wanted today to be us praying for soul rather than 'bigging him up before God'. He is right. But

that prayer must also be one of gratitude for what God has given us in our own Francis. And he would want to give thanks for the love and care of this community, especially his chauffeur Judith and the Corcoran family of whose joyful household Frank became an extended and regular part. The readings, I hope, reflect the balance of our task.

Frank, with St. Paul, would own that phrase – God has chosen his servants, not because we are fantastic people, beautiful jewellery boxes, but rather because we are humble clay pots. So it will be obvious that the treasure comes from God not us. And, whatever dire circumstance we find ourselves in, we never give up or cease to hope. Later, in the same letter, Paul uses the phrase, ‘We are the impostors who speak the truth.’ We do not stand here as servants of God because we are perfect but only by His love and mercy. (Hypocrites etc) Paul goes on: ‘We are wretched men but always rejoicing. Poor, we make many rich. Penniless, we have everything !’ Amen.

In our very last conversation, Frank said to me: ‘Father, I want you to know that I have forgiven those who have hurt me in my life and I have asked the forgiveness of God and those whom I have hurt.’ That is part of the mystery of salvation and why ‘forgiveness’ is bedded deep in the warp and woof of our reconciliation with God and our hope of eternal life. It is why Christ died. It is why every altar stands under the crucifix of Calvary and every Mass celebrates that intersection of time and eternity where Man can enter the Presence – a foretaste of the destiny of the faithful. The Mass, unsurprisingly, was the centre of Frank’s life. The Gospel today leads us further into the mystery of redemption. It is the Gospel of Candlemass. Mary and Joseph bring the baby Jesus to the Temple to give thanks and dedicate Him. They are met by an old man, Simeon, a regular drawn by the Holy Spirit .

He takes Jesus in his arms and praised God. He is, as far as we know, the first person to hold Jesus after Mary and Joseph. Imagine Jesus being placed in your arms. This, again, is the heart of the Mass. And Simeon’s

response was extraordinary. He thanked God that he could now die in peace because he had seen the Saviour – seen Him and held Him.

And he speaks deep things to Mary. Jesus will be the sign for the rise and fall of many in Israel. AND Mary's own heart will be pierced by sorrow and the secrets of many hearts will be revealed in this. In the attitude people take to Mary, is revealed the reality of their hearts. Frank knew this, He loved Mary. He walked the Rose Garden of the Mysteries every day with her – becoming, with her, a heart of love for Jesus.

He understood the pain of her heart as, week by week, in fair weather or foul, he stood, her silent witness, outside the abortion clinic praying for the conflicted women entering and the children who would die under this merciless modern regime of eugenics and destructive materialism. He stood there until he could stand no longer, a gracious gentle witness of the love of God.

Usually I would say at a funeral that we have a threefold task – to mourn, give thanks and pray. We need not mourn him, though we may weep for ourselves. I rejoiced that His Lord and ours had finally answered his prayer, Simeon's prayer. 'Now I can die in peace because I have seen salvation – Jesus.'

We have much to give thanks for. Frank has been, what I call, 'the praying engine of this church'. We have not lost his support. He may be even better placed to intercede for us. But we must continue to pray for him. He did not die 'perfect' He has now entered the Purification, the Purgatory, where the purifying fire of God's love prepares us for entry into the eternal Presence. Being prayed for on this final lap of the journey home is the least we can do for one another. It is our final gift of love. Pray for him often and with compassion.

My little hope is that, when I haul my shabby soul to the gates of St. Peter and Peter looks down my 'rap sheet' with scarcely disguised disappointment, I will say, in mitigation,

‘But I am a friend of Frank Philip’ and a now smiling St. Peter will reply,
‘Why didn’t you say?’