



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Ascension of the Lord – Year B

He Ascends

Readings: Acts 1: 1-11, Ps 46, Ephesians 1: 17-23, Mark 16: 15-20

Out of the Oxford of the 1940s there emerged three notable literary giants of the Christian world. One was C.S. Lewis, another was J.R.R. Tolkien and the third was Charles Williams. They were part of a group that rejoiced under the name of the 'Inklings' and met variously in Lewis' rooms, the 'Eagle and Child' (better known as 'Bird and Baby') and the 'Lamb and Flag' hostelrys. When they were not swopping ideas and reading their latest offerings, they amused themselves by seeing who could read the purple prose outpourings of Amanda McKittrick Ros longest without collapsing in hysterical laughter.

Williams is the least known of the famous three. His books never took off in quite the same way and he died early. His novels were an expression of the revelation of mystical and spiritual realities breaking through into the ordinary. His work on Dante was an inspiration to subsequent translators and his theology was an unique take on the nature of time and spiritual relationship.

His adherence to the Faith was born out of his understanding of the powers of the Enemy – he had dallied in years previous with membership of occult societies and their mystical practices. Hence his ability to see through them.

I make this preamble because we are on the Feast of the Ascension and William's short but challenging book, 'The Descent of the Dove' – a short history of the Holy Spirit in the Church – begins with this remarkable quote:

'The beginning of Christendom is, strictly, at a point of time. A metaphysical trigonometry finds it among the spiritual secrets, at the meeting of two heavenward lines. One is drawn from Bethany, along the Ascent of the Messiah. The other is drawn from Jerusalem against the Descent of the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit). That measurement, the measurement of eternity in operation, of the bright cloud and the rushing wind, is, in effect, theology.'

We need not be intimidated by language here. (I was rubbish at trigonometry). Williams is saying, in a pithy formula, what we pilgrims already know – that the history of Christendom is an operation of the Holy Spirit responding to the Word, in full co-inherence with the will of the Father. The Holy Trinity at work.

The same Holy Spirit that, on the Word of the Father, brings creation out of nothing and brings order out of the formless void.

This is the same Holy Spirit who, in fire and cloud, will lead the people of God out of slavery into the Exodus and on to the Promised Land.

This is the same Holy Spirit who inflames the hearts of the Prophets to forth tell the Word of God in their time.

This is the same Holy Spirit who will overshadow the our Blessed Mother and bring the Word Himself into the world incarnate in the womb of the Immaculate

This is the same Holy Spirit who, a few days hence, will descend upon the Apostles in tongues of fire and, by sight unseen, roar through the upper room in a gale of grace.

This is the same Holy Spirit who, invoked daily at the Altars of Catholic Christendom, presences the Lamb of the sacrifice whose immolation enables the reconciliation of Fallen Man with God and his intended eternal destiny.

All this becomes possible because, post-Resurrection, the Risen Christ, having defeated sin and death and harrowed Hell, here on the Bethany Road, makes the final decisive journey in our humanity. Christ Jesus, God and Man, takes our redeemed humanity, body and soul, from time into eternity.

HE ASCENDS - and with Him our hope of glory. He is no longer bounded by geography, His ubiquity becomes the possibility, indeed reality, of the Real Presence. Here on the altar of sacrifice we are involved in the operation of the Holy Spirit, in the work of the Church, sacrament and salvation. All that remains is to tumble out into the street and tell the watching world.

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