



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

All Saints-November 1st 2021

Readings: Apocalypse 7: 2-4. 9-14, Psalm 23, 1 John 3: 1-3,

Matthew 5: 1-12

‘We shall be like Him’

One of the dangers of too many offices of prayer and too much Bible reading – could there be such a thing I hear you cry – is that of familiarity. We can glide swiftly over key phrases that ought to make us stop with amazement and gratitude and pause as we experience the breathtaking promises and power of God in Jesus Christ, Our Lord. In today’s epistle from St. John, just for a moment let’s dwell on the phrase, ‘We shall be like Him’. The beloved disciple is claiming that, in the fullness of time and in eternity, we shall be like God Himself!

Looking around at the motley crew and their shabby priests who assemble here each Sabbath, that seems an astonishing claim. But that is what John says and few people can claim to be closer to the mind of Christ. I don’t know about you but I feel a long way from such an extraordinary transformation. I do not expect to be echoing the Roman emperor Vespasian whose deathbed confession included the ironic line, ‘Dear Me, I think I am becoming a god’.

But.....brothers and sisters, there is, within the Christian claim, an element of that remarkable claim.

Consider who we are. Consider the journey set before us.

Consider Christ's instructions to us – 'Be holy as your Heavenly Father is holy'. We are those redeemed by Christ. We are those who, in Him, are promised eternal life in the Presence of the Almighty. We are those who have been 'christ-ened', marked with the sign of incorporation into the crucified, risen, ascended and glorified body of Jesus, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Nothing purely temporal can dwell in eternity. Nothing unholy can find a place in the eternity of God. So we must change and we must be changed. That process is called Sanctification and it is one of the three primary duties of a priest towards the people entrusted to his care. (The other two being Teaching and Governance). He is to prepare his flock for eternity. Thus sainthood is the goal of every follower of Christ. Some may achieve in this life, most of us continue that process in the Purification that follows this mortal journey. There, in the fire of God's love, all that is not holy is purged from us, making us fit for Heaven and to stand in the Presence. This is possible only if we are 'in Christ' – for He has dwelt in our humanity and taken it into the glory of the Godhead. In Him the mortal has become immortal, time is translated into eternity and the human has been transfigured into the divine. The children of Adam – fallen, mortal – have been adopted into the new Adam, which is Christ, and share His glory. We have a new bloodline in Christ. In Him the Sons of Adam and the Daughters of Eve become the Children of God. Man has been rescued by the action of God in Man. Nothing else could do it. No lesser sacrifice could have rescued us from death. It is what Jesus means when He proclaims, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life....no man comes to the Father but by me.' This is not exclusivist hyperbole but merely the setting forth of the divine logic of salvation. You want to live forever in the loving Presence of God? You need to be on board the divine/human vehicle who alone transports us heavenward.

The Incarnation of God in Man enables the Apotheosis of Man into God.

It is what St Paul means when he writes, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' and 'Just as we have borne the image of the Man of Dust (Adam), so we must bear the image of the Man of Heaven (Jesus Christ).' It is when 'the mortal puts on immortality'. This is the business of Sainthood. But it is not just the business of those who have been elevated to the dignity of the altar 'upon whose constant intercession in your Presence we rely for unfailing help.' (Eucharistic Prayer III).

It is our business too for it is the glorious work of salvation in Christ. It is our hope of eternal life and it is our solemn and joyful task to evangelise the world with the good news of this road out of sin and death and into the hope of forever.

Today we celebrate All the Saints but we also re-dedicate ourselves to joining them. Saint Judith of Bodmin, Saint Michael of Wadebridge, Saint Tony of Padstow or Saint Suzy of Tintagel (or St Robbie of Lostwithiel !) might seem a long way down the road – but that is the road we are on and, consequently, we rejoice in the company of the Saints in Light and thank God for their prayers which cheer us on our way.