



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Advent-Year C-December 12th 2021

Readings: Zephaniah 3: 14-18, Psalm 12, Philippians 4: 4-7, Luke 3: 10-18

Those of us of a certain age, now unwilling residents of the ever expanding Costa Geriatrica will recall that excitement on a Friday night at 6pm, in the 1960s, when the ‘Queen of the Mods’, Cathy McGowan, would launch us into the weekend with another edition of ‘Ready, Steady, Go’ – the revolutionary pop show where you might suddenly meet the Fab Four, the Animals, the Who or the pouting strutting animal magnetism of Sir Michael Jagger and the, now, Strolling Bones. Fresh from such rowdy inspiration us lesser mortals would ‘glam up’ and set out for the hoped for meeting with the love of our lives.

I was reflecting on this cultural phenomenon with one of my oldest friends the other day. He had just turned seventy, the biblical allowance of Man, and we had shared many such hopeful weekends more than half a century ago. My buddy, who has wisely opted for anonymity, was the best looking boy of our year, an infuriatingly effortless ‘babe magnet’ and had a ‘Peter Pan’ quality that has ridiculously endured the ravages of time. Not any more. He had, he said, seen his reflection on his seventieth birthday and been undone. The face that stared back at him was no longer one he recognised or owned. The Portrait of Dorian Gray had come

down from the attic and was haunting his bathroom mirror. He had, he said, always seen life as an endless horizon but now it was clear that it was not. The carefree days of youth were irretrievable, the pretence of futurity empty, the approaching storm of senility gathering pace and no chart to plot a safe course through the rising swell, no safe harbour, no direction home.

Cue for a fairly profound theological excursus. Simple existentialism was proving bankrupt but there were places still on the ark of salvation.

Unpreparedness has become the tragic hallmark of our generation and, I find especially among my fellow men, a deep anger that our mortality should be as it inevitably is. Spoiled children of a golden age of prosperity and licence, there is an inchoate but burgeoning rage against reality. Unable to accept the logic of biology or their chosen theology of Darwinianism, that fury is often directed against the 'god' in whom they have never believed. Mercifully my friend is not at that point yet – merely disarmed and rudderless in a mounting storm.

Preparation: As followers of Christ we are not immune to fear or confusion at times but we are not surprised by reality.

We are not enthusiastic seekers of death but we are familiar with mortality and carry the death of Christ in our bodies - and the glorious hope of Resurrection. We do not see ourselves as the inevitable flotsam of history but rather riders of the storm in the little fishing boat on the Galilee or the unworthy crew of the Sark of Salvation which is the Church. We have a chart in the Word of God and a primitive understanding of when to put up more prayer sail and when to reef in plans, batten down the hatches and either ride it out or run before the storm. These are spiritual disciplines we learn and learn early. The obvious hazards of the deep and the ruinous deceptions of the shallows should be part of our earliest navigation training.

We have a destination, a destiny, a distant port, a longed for landfall, a half forgotten, but now suddenly recognised homecoming.

In all this our seamanship will be tested and often severely. And, in extremis, all that matters is that the Pilot's hand is the one on the tiller.

What we cannot afford to do is to carry excess cargo. We should never set out weighed down past the waterline or we will surely sink.

There needs to be a clearout. We should not confuse essential ballast with much of the garbage that weighs our little barque down.

Advent is a great time for preparation, time in dry dock, repair, refit, the hull scraped, the hatches emptied of the accrued waste, shedding the lumber and cleaning the much befouled 'heads'.

We are getting shipshape for the coming season, the next stage of the voyage.

For a Catholic that process is generously provided for in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And it is a complete mystery to me why so many Catholics avoid it, put it off, fear it or dance round the obligation.

It is the necessary regular encounter with reality – the reality of who we are and who God is.

It is the unedifying peek in the bathroom mirror which reveals the hidden portrait of the self but, all too wonderfully, reveals what, set free, we shall yet be in Christ.

It is the supreme sacrament of liberation and renewal.

It is our natural and life enhancing preparation for the encounter of the Mass. Who, in their right mind would want to face the Captain's inspection bemerded with sin? Who would want to set sail with a leaky hold full of unstable junk dragging the vessel of the soul under, wallowing and floundering in the first heavy swell? Let's get serious about this.

If we are getting prepared to meet the real love of our lives then the first port of call is the changing room of the confessional. Then we can, with joyful hearts and walking on air, go into the weekend of the feast all shipshape and Bristol fashion, prepared for the next stage of the voyage of salvation.

Let's get our preparation done and done thoroughly and well.

Our lives may depend on it.

Ready ? Steady ? Go !