



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday of Advent-Year C-December 19th 2021

Readings: Micah 5:1-4, Psalm 79, Hebrews 10: 5-10, Luke 1: 39-44

At this time of the year children often ambush the priest by asking him if he believes in Santa Claus. It's best to have thought this out a bit beforehand to avoid impersonating a stunned haddock on the fishmonger's slab, eyes glazed, mouth open before a sea of knowing theological terrorists who think they have cracked the code and the hopeful believers who cannot countenance such a consummate betrayal.

My response is pretty straightforward. I have no doubts about St. Nick – he's on solid ground. Do I believe in some fat jolly man who used to come down chimneys but now has to materialise through central heating pipes well.... Let's just say this – and I do, 'You know fellers, I went through times of doubt too but....you know every year I hang my stocking up it gets filled. Every year I doubted and didn't put it out I got zippo. You take your pick.'

Suddenly agnosticism doesn't seem so attractive.

I mention this because 'anticipation' – looking forward, grasping something before it is revealed, is a key part of what makes us different from the rest of the animal kingdom.

Many years ago, when our children were teenagers, one of them very bravely 'came out' to usas an agnostic. He had thought about it a lot and couldn't make sense of this whole religion thing. He was, he went on, not unsympathetic to Ma and I having a need for an intellectual justification for our existence and an emotional crutch in time of need.....etc. etc.' His mother's response was brief and to the point. 'There were', she said, 'an hundred good reasons for not believing in God but portentous and patronising crap was not on the list. When you come up with something better, we'll talk.' I'm afraid Mama never did the course in Sympathetic Pastoral Counselling.

Well, over the years, he has come back a lot. His respect for the Faith is strong. His appreciation of his siblings' faith appreciated and his regular engagement with my public outpourings among the most welcome of respondents. He has Mass said for us and goes and lights a candle for us when passing an open church. A few years later he asked this question. 'How do you get Faith?' It's a good one and I have found many men asking essentially the same question- they seem to have less grasp on the intangible than their womenfolk. 'Well,' I replied, 'How do you get Radio 4?' First you invest in a radio. You avail yourself of the means of communication.

Radio 4 does not just emerge out of the kitchen wall – thank God. Then you plug it in and turn it on. You connect to the source of power and transmission. And then you fiddle about with the dial swooshing through incomprehensible foreign stations, white noise and musical garbage until you find that familiar BBC intonation and sense of effortless superiority. Of course this isn't the perfect metaphor for church and prayer but the wireless is only implausible magic to those who discount electricity and soundwaves. Prayer is only implausible hokum for those who have never sought the source of power and

regularly and painstakingly tuned in. Get in the right place and get plugged in and tuned up.

Christians, in their anticipation, this time of the Second Advent, are not social fantasists or operators of a bankrupt mythology, but those who have seen what works, experienced what is true, been in regular touch with the undergirding reality and anticipate, grasp in advance, what is to come.

I know there is a God, not because I am a smartarse but because He speaks to me every day in His Word – even when I'm not listening too good. He engages me in the paucity of my prayer life and in my all too fleeting glimpses at His Word. His wisdom echoes in the deep chambers of my soul. He reveals Himself both in the immense majesty of His creation and in the lives of the Saints, those on the calendar and the unsung ones amongst whom I have been privileged to minister and dwell. He has spoken to me at the critical moments of my life and always told me true. In Christ, He declares for me the highest hope for and doctrine of Man – that we are made in the image of God and, destined, by His grace and mercy alone, for eternity and the companionship of the divine. I know that there is another life beyond this, not of any wisdom of my own, but of the truth of the Gospel and the resurrection witness. Like an unborn child, I may not be able to comprehend the extraordinary parameters of what is to come next but the divine life force imparted in the Sacraments gives me earnest of that unbounded hope.

We are, Advent reminds us, both a people of well-founded hope and eager anticipation.

We long for what will be with all our hearts and minds, souls and bodies. We anticipate it, grasp it beforehand, and mark the chart of our voyage

home with the compass points of Heaven and an understanding of the
ever turning tides of the history of Man.

However long the horizon, there will be landfall and harbour and home.