



Advent meditation 25 by Father Robbie Low

ADVENT XXV

We have rehearsed the provenance of the Messiah and, it is quite clear from New Testament preaching that a primary requirement is that He should be of the line of David. The painstaking genealogies of Matthew and Luke and their priority of story in ensuring that this otherwise scruffy and scandalous oik from an unconsidered and dangerously multi-cultural northern town meets the tests of both bloodline and birth location is no accident. David and Bethlehem, the House of Bread are lodestones of authenticity.

The Root of Jesse, the antiphon declares, will be a sign to the people. Before Him the rulers of the earth will shut their mouths, dumbstruck in awe before His authority and power. The whole world, all the nations, will pay Him homage and pray to Him.

Understandably this little and much battered Israel implores this Messiah to come and deliver her without delay.

The insistence on the line of David comes from the unshakeable promise of God to the dynasty. Neither Christian nor Jew see any wriggle room for God in this eternal covenant, oath, sacramentum.

We see the artistic representations of Radix Jesse, the old patriarch lying, as on a chaise longue, with a mighty tree emanating from his organ of increase and rising heavenward, its fruit the dynasty of the royal

house. No man can look on its scale without a frisson of awe and an inevitable wave, however mild, of jealousy.

Of course, it was not always thus. Cast your mind back to the choosing of David. The Israelites, despite of the sovereignty of God, had asked for a human king – so that they could be ‘like everybody else’. Despite God’s warning, through the prophet Samuel, they had gone ahead. The first choice, Saul, had not been a success. Chosen, it would seem, primarily for his physique, he was literally head and shoulders above the rest, he had turned out to be a dud.

Samuel, summoned by God, then has to engage in a covert act of treason. Off he goes to Bethlehem to discern which of the sons of Jesse is to succeed.

All the strapping lads line up and Samuel is mightily impressed by their physique. The Lord, it seems, is not. At the end of the royal beauty contest none have been chosen. Puzzling. ‘Do you have any other sons?’ the prophet enquires. Well there is the lad, the young ‘un, the brat, the unconsidered. He’s out tending the sheep, we didn’t think you’d want to see him. He’s not a candidate, surely.

But, of course, he is. To the Lord, at least, size is not important. And this theme of the small unconsidered and unlikely triumphing for God is underscored by David’s first appearance on the national scene when his victory over the enemy’s terrifying giant champion, Goliath, secures his place in the national affection.

How important this theme is should not escape us. Remember when Moses sends out scouts to suss out the likelihood of victory over the then inhabitants of the land of promise. Two of the scouts want to get on with it and trust in the power of God. The rest return terrified – we

look just like grasshoppers to them, goes the report. The smallness of Israel, cramped and crushed successively between the brutal and marauding powers of Hittites, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome inform successive generations with the same fear.

On the basis of size and human plausibility, of course, God would never have chosen Israel, never have chosen little David, never have inaugurated the Church in the way He did or left it to the ramshackle bunch of disciples to win the world. We are too small, too old, too impotent, we cry. Yet the only question to which we need to know the answer is this. Is Jesus the Messiah? Is He the sacred bearer of the Kingship of God? If He is then Goliath may snarl contempt, empires may rise and threaten but the Church of God, if she is faithful, will triumph yet and now and in eternity.

We are of the Radix Jesse. Kings will button their lips. Nations will pay homage. Our confidence is critical and we are not confident in our feeble selves but in the power of God and His promise of victory.

Spiritual exercise: Look around at your congregation and in the mirror. Can God really change the world through this little faithful bunch? Remember little David and next time you are afraid to go into battle for Christ do not be put off by the raging or size of the enemy. The victory has already been won.