



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday of Easter – Year C

As beautiful as a bride dressed for her husband

Readings: Acts 14: 21-27, Ps 144, Ap 21: 1-5, John 13: 31-35

Those of you who follow my scribblings and musings via the website will be familiar with my fascination with the programme, 'SAY YES TO THE DRESS'. For the uninitiated I should explain that it follows the quest of 'Brides to Be' for the perfect dress for THE BIG DAY. I hasten to add that I watch it out of a sense of theological and sociological duty – and, of course, with my wife's permission and often, truth to tell, her company. The extraordinary thing is that, almost to a woman, the women share the same misapprehensions about the marriage to which this WEDDING is the gateway. They are always marrying their 'best friend' – that is not the same as a husband, delightful though this illusion may be. Nearly all of them want to be a 'Princess' for a day and most of them cannot distinguish between a suitable gown for presenting themselves at the altar (or wherever) and the honeymoon lingerie. They describe their requirements as, variously, a dress that is at once 'Full of the WOW Factor', 'Unique', 'Sexy', 'Classy', etc. Whenever someone uses the word 'classy' you know instinctively that you are doomed to an explosion of bad taste. And one is not disappointed. An endless cavalcade of shoulderless body wrappings, bedevilled by 'bling' and advertising excessive embonpoint follows. We are seldom restrained by a sense of grace or dignity or modesty – virtue and virginity being unmentionable anachronisms.

There is much much more but not here, not now. I mention this as a preamble because today's reading from the Apocalypse contains that wonderful picture of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven 'as beautiful as a bride dressed for her husband'.

It is an image we might ponder well and long. We know that the most regular description of God's relationship with His People is that of a Marriage. We know that God's heart is regularly wounded by the infidelity and promiscuity of His People. We

know that, when He came as Man, God in Christ performed His first miracle at a Wedding – Christ Himself, The Wedding of Heaven and Earth, The Wedding of God and Man replenishing with His word, through the obedient servants and at the intercession of His Blessed Mother, the failed hospitality of Man.

We know also that the Church is referenced as the Bride of Christ in the great passage in Ephesians Ch 5. as well as other texts. That being the case.....we are the Church and thus the Bride of Christ. How we present ourselves to our beloved Lord is not without significance. This is not a call to 'up your Sunday wardrobe' – though it is significant that we no longer talk about 'Sunday best' but rather slouch in something 'comfortable' because, God loves me as I am' etc. etc. This is not the approach, I imagine, any of us would take on an invitation to a royal garden party. And that, be she ever so regal, is a temporary monarchy over a small territory. We come to the King of Kings, The Lord of All.

What matters more is the attire of the soul. We are to be beautiful for God. That beauty is made up of virtue, truth, kindness, justice, modesty, grace, humility, faithfulness, hopefulness, obedience, love. When we look in the mirror of the soul, what do we see? Are we rocking up at the altar of God, unwashed of our soiling sins, without the wedding garments of preparation and care? Would we do this at a mortal's dinner party never mind the Eternal Banquet of the King?

When the priest looks down the Nave of the Church does He see the beautiful Bride of Christ filled with love and longing for her Lord?

When the People of God look toward the place of the Sacrifice, do they see, however shabbily disguised in geriatric humanity, something of the In Persona Christi, in the Priest?

When we look around at our neighbours in the pews are we conscious that these are the reconciled people with whom we are hoping to spend eternity. Does our heart rejoice at the prospect? Are we fellow companions of the Confessional?

If a stranger came in to our house of prayer today would they be conscious that something extraordinary was going on? Something so special that all our attention was wrapt? Something so powerful that exudes absolute seriousness and profound joy at one and the same time? Something intangible that somehow incarnates in the very dull ordinariness of our humanity and yet illuminates this shambling animated dust? Something so strange and yet so familiar, at once so gloriously transcendent and yet

almost tangible in its pulsating immanence, the twitch on the thread that recalls the wanderer and the lost and revives the image of God in Man.

For ourselves - do we prepare as a bride for her husband, as a soul for the Lord? When the note strikes are our hearts ready and overflowing with praise or do we reluctantly begin to flick through the hymnbook? When the Word is delivered are we all ears, waiting on God, rehearsing the story of our salvation? When the smoke surrounds the altar do we moan about medieval flummery or are we conscious of the sign – the prayers of the saints ascending and the fragrance of Christ. The sign that we are in the back row of Heaven and the front row of earth, unlikely and profoundly grateful guests at the mystical banquet of the CHURCH TRIUMPHANT.

When the bell rings do we think of it as an antiquarian gesture from pre-conciliar complexity or as a reminder that there are still things we cannot see with the eyes of the Body and yet are utterly real as the metamorphosis occurs and the ordinary gifts of Man become the extraordinary gifts of God. Do we hear the wedding bells of Heaven and Earth? Are we properly penitent and utterly serious and profoundly thankful and heart-filled joyful people who want to be something beautiful for God?