



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

### **7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – Year C**

#### ***The Ascent of Man?***

*Readings: Acts 7:55-60, Ps 97, Revelation 22:12-14,16-17,20, John 17:20-26*

In 1973 Jacob Bronowski starred in an unusual TV series. It was a brilliant set of highly personal scientific essays on the cultural high points of human civilisation and entitled 'The Ascent of Man'. (It is still available on the net and remarkable for its daring to be even remotely intellectual on TV.) The Ascent focussed on the gradually building and improving reality of the foremost creature in creation, Man – the one animal that does not conform to evolution by adapting to his environment but rather changes that environment to suit himself. In this use of reason and skill he is unique.

Of course that ASCENT is not consistent, nor is it predictable, nor is it at all inevitable. It is not one uninterrupted upward flow. The nature of Man does not greatly change, regardless of the thin veneer that high culture bestows. A sophisticated mathematics and astronomy did not prevent the Mayans from primitive sacrificial murder. The possession of Beethoven and Goethe did not preclude the rise of Hitler in Germany. Man's history is a mixture of the almost divine, 'a little lower than the

angels', and the positively satanic. The constant alone is the fallenness of Man and the hope of his redemption. It has been both touching and alarming to hear my contemporaries say, for example of the current conflict in Ukraine, 'How can this be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?', as if something had fundamentally altered in the state of Man. While President Biden is bleating about the wickedness of Vlad the Bad killing Ukrainians, he himself is ramping up the murder count of his own country's unborn children with undisguised enthusiasm. Civilised, we are not.

We are merely self-deceiving in our arrogance. We like to think well of ourselves. Even more significantly we like other people to think well of us –even on a trivial level. A trivial example.....

On the recent pilgrimage one of our charges, an autistic boy of sixteen, with a forensic mind and a very dry wit, had been asking our group leader very personal questions. When he had debriefed her, he turned to me. First question: 'How old are you Fr Robbie?'

I tried to pull that stunt that a lot of old people do? 'How old do you think?' This is said in the hope that the questioner will come back and say 60 or, at worst, 65 and I can then say 72 and allow the desired compliments to flow. He looked at me unwaveringly and considered.... 'EIGHTY', he replied. It was no more than I deserved and, as I was having a good day, I dread to think what he would have guessed if he saw me in the days after the pilgrimage when my once reliable 'bounce-back' may have been operating in eternity but certainly not in the present. It reminded, and with great hilarity, how easily our vanity is unmasked.

The true Ascent of Man cannot be found in cultural or scientific achievement, delightful though that is for the most part. But it depends upon the very thing that we celebrate on this mysterious but crucial feast day of the Ascension of Christ. For here, the crucified and risen Lord, having been witnessed by many and having taught the disciples and commissioned the soon-to-be Apostles, does something that forever guarantees the Ascent of Man. Still robed in that crucified and risen humanity, Christ takes that same stuff of our lives into the Heavens. In this Ascent of Man in the Godhead of Christ, the door is open to the apotheosis of Man, the divinisation of the faithful in Christ, the access to eternity of this little quintessence of dust that is Man. In Christ, Man is risen, ascended and glorified. Our way to that promise is only through the person of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour. Only in faithful solidarity with Him our ascent, albeit through the long realms of purification and sanctification, is assured. As we stand on the Bethany Road, looking up to Heaven, we see our future ascending with Christ Jesus into the Presence of the Father and into forever.