



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Advent-Year A-December 11th 2022

Readings: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10, Psalm 145, James 5: 7-10,

Matthew 11: 2-11

After the Patriarch (Noah) and the King (David) I move on to a Prophet.

Do you ever get depressed? Or perhaps you are lucky enough to be a Pollyanna person. We often view Biblical heroes or great saints of the Faith as somehow impervious to such dark feelings – as if they knew the result and pushed on cheerfully in spite of the growing evidence of hardship and persecution ahead. In one sense that is correct. By faith we do know the result but that doesn't necessarily diminish the suffering or the sense of gathering gloom as we look around the scarcely recognisable ruins of Christendom and wonder what God is doing with His People. Although I am as curmudgeonly as the next elderly gent I rarely get the 'black dog' of depression. But I do have on my desk, as one of my two great Biblical heroes, a portrait of a prophet whose triumphs and extraordinary adventures did not relieve him of the occasional moment of black despair. I speak, of course, of Elijah.

Elijah is the great 9th Century BC prophet of the Northern Kingdom. He ministers in a time of relative prosperity to a nation that, under King

Ahab and Queen Jezebel, has drifted into polytheistic paganism. The upshot, as always when phony liberalism enthrones 'diversity', is that familiar tyranny that tolerates everything but the truth. Elijah spends most of his life on the run, abroad, in the desert, hiding from the murderous forces of the State security. Supported by a tiny network of covert sympathisers, he continues to preach the One True God in the face of the religious triumphalism of the establishment 'multi-faith' brigade. He calls out corruption in high places.

He stands foursquare against the ascendant religious materialism that reduces persons to disposable 'matter'.

And Elijah gets mightily depressed. Comfortable in their prosperity, the People of God are content to 'go with the material flow'. No-one is queueing up to pop their head over the parapet and challenge the wickedness.

And so we find Elijah, his great triumph on Carmel recently achieved, once more in hiding from the forces of the dark queen. Setting out into the wilderness from Beersheba, he sits under a furze bush and laments loud and long to God. 'Take my life, Lord. I wish I were dead. I am no better than my ancestors.' The great project for the reconversion of Israel is apparently in ruins. In spite of his triumphs, Elijah feels a failure. The game, he seems to say, is up.

So God feeds him by an angel and sends him to Horeb, the mountain of the Law, back to the origins of the Mosaic Covenant. The depression has not lifted. Elijah continues his lament from the cave where he has been hiding. 'I have been jealous for the true God – the defender of the Faith. The People of Israel have abandoned the Faith, torn down your altars, killed your prophets and I am the only one left. AND they want to kill

me!' Our religious reflections my sometimes run along similar lines – without such public and heroic credentials. 'Everyone else has chucked it in. The great army of the lapsed are consorting with the enemy. All my work at passing on the Faith has come to nothing. The very fabric of the once Godly society has been replaced by pagan materialism. Telling the truth can result in arrest. I am an exile in my own land and a stranger in my own culture. The Church is on its last legs. I've had enough. Take me home before it gets worse.'

We can sit with our hero under the furze bush and lament. We can hunker down in our cave and ask God to take us before it gets worse. But that would not be what God requires of even the least of His servants. He doesn't ask us to be successful. That is not in our own gift. He asks us to be faithful. So He asks Elijah to be faithful still. Not to give up in the darkest days. God calls him back to the roots of his Faith. He has him travel to the mountain of the Presence and...there He reveals Himself – the mighty wind, the shuddering rocks and splitting earth, the blazing fire – but then the thin silence, the whispered Word of the still small voice. Elijah is commissioned to go back and anoint the future – the king who will storm the ramparts of the pagan fortress – the prophet who will take on his mantle and keep the sacred flame alive and exercise the power of God in even greater degree. And this he does before his prayer is answered and he is taken up in glory.

You and I are not Elijah but we have, in our own small local, parochial way, the same task. However depressed we may be by the state of the nation, the culture, the Church, we have work to do before we are taken home (in a rather more pedestrian way than Elijah). We are not to sit around hoping that there will be a priest to see us out and then 'Goodnight Vienna'

We are to seek to dwell in the Presence often. We are to know and fearlessly proclaim the Word of God regardless of the cost. We are to look around and, with the guidance of God, anoint the future, knowing that all things are in God's hands and that the ship of the Church may be storm battered but cannot sink with Christ on board. We may sometimes feel that 'I am the only one left' but that would not be true. There is work to be done.

To quote T S Eliot

'Old men ought to be explorers' (and presumably old women too) 'Here or there does not matter We must be still and still moving Into another intensity For a further union, a deeper communion.'

This Advent let us together proclaim: 'Horeb, here we come. To seek, in our origins our end - and to hear again the Word as if for the first time and to go forth boldly and anoint the future.'

Then, in the words of the old spiritual, we can 'Go like Elijah when we go.'