



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

Whiteflower Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 49: 3, 5-6, Ps 40, 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3, John 1: 29-34

Many years ago I was invited to an Anglican evangelical conference in London by a wonderful spiritual former senior colleague. John had a great sense of humour and he insisted on introducing me to the speaker – a hugely successful preacher who did not really think Catholics were Christians. Introductions complete, John stood back and waited for the response from the great man.

‘Ah,’ said the great man, ‘a Judaizing Christian’ - a dismissive comment which, I think, implied that we were too bound up in the Old Testament ritual to be counted as Christians. ‘Fifteen – love’, I heard John mutter under his breath and his eyes twinkled as he awaited my return shot. ‘It is my experience that it is no good telling people that Jesus is the answer if they don’t know what the question was in the first place.’ I replied.

There was a momentary pause while the great man, unused to contradiction or correction, took stock of the situation. And then he roared with laughter. ‘Come and join me for lunch. We must talk more.’ We did.

I begin with this little anecdote because ignorance of the Old Testament often leaves us hamstrung in our attempts to explain and evangelise the Faith. If we really don’t know the OT then we are hugely ignorant of the

reason for the coming of Christ, the extraordinary nature of divine intervention, the cause of Man's predicament and the long history of salvation. Jesus then becomes in danger of simply being advertised as a good chap espousing decent social values in an age which presented inevitable cultural difficulties rather than the Son of God, the Word Incarnate, the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Davidic King, the King of the Universes, the power behind all creation, the redeemer of mortal Man. In today's Gospel we hear John the Baptist point to Jesus and declare Him to be 'THE LAMB OF GOD'. It is a title so significant that we employ it at the high point of every Mass as the Host, the sacred Body, is elevated and presented to God before the people.

I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that, to an outsider, that language would be puzzling and, at best, sentimental. Mention lambs to most people and they get a picture of a cute fluffy creature gambolling in the springtime meadows. Ergo the Christian view of Jesus is a fluffy, cuddly thing. Come Easter this changes to Jesus the fluffy bunny of much popular modern theological reflection. This is a 'Jesus' that bears no relation to the God-Man of the Gospels. And why would it?

John is not being sentimental here? John is pointing back to the great and formative event in the history of the people of God, the Passover. Let me briefly recall that extraordinary lead up to the Lamb. The Hebrews are enslaved in Egypt. The once glorious welcome to the family of Joseph has soured into a deep fear and hatred of the immigrant. The contraceptive practices of the Egyptians in contrast to the breeding of the Hebrews is causing a demographic crisis. The immigrants are taking over. The only way to stop them is by culling. The Hebrew midwives are instructed to euthanise male babies. Murder them. Years later, when the escapee from the programme of the final solution and exile from the royal palace, Moses, has

encountered God in the Bush of Fire and returned to lead his people to freedom, there ensues a series of terrible plagues to persuade Pharaoh to cooperate and release the slave nation. The final and most terrible plague is the death of the firstborn – an almost karmic payback for the years of state sponsored slaughter of the innocent. The Hebrews are exempt only by virtue of a sign. They are to take an unblemished Lamb and sacrifice it to God. They are to eat it and prepare for the journey to the Land of the Promise. Most importantly they are to take the blood – the sign of life which a Hebrew is forbidden to consume – and mark the doorposts and the lintel (a threefold sign) with the Blood of the Lamb. By this sign alone will the Angel of Death know to PASS OVER the houses of the Faithful and leave them unharmed while the pagan houses of the persecutors will pay the full penalty of death for their murderous regime and contempt for the one true God.

So when we proclaim ‘Agnus Dei’ – Lamb of God- we are not referring to a sentimental Saviour but to the lifeblood of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world, which alone gives us salvation from death and opens the way to the Promised Land. This is the mystery at the heart of the Sacrifice of the Mass. There is complete continuity in the history of salvation. What is accomplished as a prefiguring sign in the Book of the Exodus, is fulfilled in eternity on the Calvary by the Blood of Christ. And what is fulfilled in time and raised up to eternity is re-membered and re-presented in time on the altars of the Catholic Church every time the Mass is offered.

But that is another sermon and another time.