



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **The Baptism of the Lord, Year A**

### ***The gift of tears***

*Readings: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7, Ps 28, Acts 10: 34-38, Matthew 3: 13-17*

It was the great American humourist, Garrison Keillor, who, in one of his brilliant and hilarious reflections on his life, remarked, in a throwaway line: ‘As I get older, I get a little more moist.’

He was referring to the gift of tears rather than anything more socially disabling.

I am a few years his junior so it took me a while to catch up on him and appreciate the wisdom and accuracy of his comment. I had, it is true, noticed that men who had strokes, regardless of their previous stiff upper lips, were given to weeping and consequent embarrassment.

But the rest of us? Surely not.

Well, Keillor was, it turns out, right after all. I find myself, on unexpected occasions, suddenly ambushed by that vocal hesitation, that halting word and welling in the throat that immediately anticipates the breaking open of the fountainhead of tears. It can be a word of God, a sudden rekindling of memory, a reflection on the bridges that have been burned, a moment heart to heart with someone I love, an intense encounter in prayer with a fellow pilgrim close to Jesus. There’s no telling – except that it happens and that it

wouldn't have happened thirty years ago –or even ten.

Well it could be embarrassing BUT I have learned not only to live with it but to be grateful for those precious moments when God breaks through all my cleverness and carefully constructed self- control and encounters me in the hidden heartland of my soul.

There are all kinds of tears of course. A child may cry from hunger, discomfort, frustration, rage and we need to discern which is which if we are to parent well As adults we tend to restrain our tears to events of incalculable loss. But an adult may similarly employ tears as a weapon of control when not placated or when they see the situation spinning out of their control. Emotionalism is not a good guide to reality but it is a symptom and, again, we need to recognise the symptoms if we are to be a true friend to the weeper.

The tears that unexpectedly catch you unawares are not part of the emotional armoury but rather a gift of God that allows access to the inner chambers of the heart. They open a genuine vulnerability to love and repair and reconciliation and restoration. So, while we usually guard our vulnerability like the Keep of a medieval castle, the gift of tears is not a weak point in the defence against the cruelty of men but can be a high ocean tide that grants us access to the harbour of His mercy and grace.

Today is a lot about water. It is the material of the Sacrament of Baptism. We witness the Baptist submerge the Lord in the waters of the Jordan - We recall our own baptism when we were submerged symbolically in the waters of death that we might rise with Him. We are washed of the mark of original sin.

We are clothed in the white robe of His righteousness.  
We are anointed with the Oil of Christ as one of His Disciples.  
We bear the light of His Resurrection glory into the world.  
But Water is at the heart of it all. The Waters of Death. The Water of Life.  
The water from the side of the Crucified Lord the Priest adds to the Chalice.  
The sprinkling of the absolution in the Penitential Rite.  
The tears of sorrow in the confessional as we own that other Cross – the  
Cross of the Penitent Thief - recalled so powerfully at the funeral of our  
beloved Pope Benedict.  
Water, water everywhere.

At the whole school Epiphany Mass I noticed one of the girls leaving in  
floods of tears. Suspecting someone had been mean to her I drew her aside  
and asked what the matter was. No, she said, amidst the floods rolling down  
her cheeks, there was nothing wrong it was just that the hymn made her  
realise that it was this same baby, Jesus, whom we would one day put on the  
Cross. O, for the gift of such a heart.

I grew up believing that there was something wrong with a man who cried.  
I have come to believe that there is something wrong with a man who cannot.  
The gift of tears can be the sign of a door opening to the love and mercy of  
God. They are a gift that opens for us a perception both of the state of our  
own soul, the journey travelled, the thankfulness owed, the hurts unhealed,  
the sins unoffered for forgiveness, the tragedy of Man without God, the joy  
of the welcome home, the recognition of the love that He has shown for us,  
the incontinent gratitude to One who died for us.

As the priest adds the water to the Chalice of offering that will become  
Christ's Blood, dare we recall our own baptism and pledge and mingle our  
tears of sorrow for our sins with the tears of joy for our redemption with that

water that flows from the side of the sacrificed, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Treasure those moments of breakthrough when our defences crumble, reality supervenes and we know, with passionate intensity, how much we are loved.