



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

***The Sign on the Box***

*Readings: 1 Kings 3: 5, 7-12, Ps 118, Romans 8: 28-30, Matthew 13: 44-52*

Earlier this week I was privileged to offer the requiem Mass for Minnie Baker, our oldest at 105 and certainly one of our most devout and Christ loving parishioners. As I placed the signs of the Faith on her coffin, I was peculiarly aware of the power of those symbols and their significance for our mortal pilgrimage and our eternal destiny.

In the placing of the Holy Scriptures, the Book of the Church, we acknowledge the sovereignty of the Word of God, the extraordinary story of our salvation history by the grace and mercy of God, and the recognition that all of this is summed up and fulfilled and incarnated in Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

We place there too the central mystery of our Faith, the Crucifix, rarely, I suspect, reflecting on the paradox that the symbol and sign of that cruel death and mortal humiliation should be the key to the religion that is, above all, the proclamation and promise of life eternal and divine glory.

I was still reflecting on this when I approached today's Gospel reading. It is a simple illustration that Jesus employs here. The explorer finds the treasure in a field. He sells **everything** he has to buy that field. Totally committed. Who we might ask, would not?

Well plenty of folk apparently. And there are times when I see one of them looking back at me from the bathroom mirror. ALL FOR JESUS?

Don't get me wrong.....I do a lot for Jesus and I know that He's very grateful but, let's be reasonable here.....ALL?

It is at moments like this of uncomfortable self-awareness and, frankly, spiritual embarrassment, that I turn back to the coffin and the sign and to the central mystery of the Faith – the Crucified Lord. Because, sooner or later, and as the years rush by on roller skates, it's going to be sooner, - that will be me in the box and someone else placing the sign and praying for my soul. And that is the sign on which all my hope of absolution, purification and eternity rest. Without that I am merely another crate of gently composting humanity, however well the flowers and friends and kind words wrap it up.

Concurrent with these cheerful ruminations I began again reading ST Paul's great opening letter to that church in the wild port city of Corinth. It is the letter which contains the great hymn to the gifts of Faith and Hope and Love and which climaxes in the glorious proclamation of the Resurrection of Jesus and the life, beyond the grave, that awaits the Christian faithful.

But it begins with a rallying call to the centrality of the Cross.

St Paul writes: 'The language of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing but to those of us who are being saved, it is the power of God'.

And again... 'When I came to you, brothers, it was not with any great oratory but to show you what God had guaranteed. The only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus – and Him crucified.'

Paul does not dwell on the Incarnation – though there is major work on this in his letter to the church in Colossae. He does not begin with the Resurrection hope – which blossoms at the end of this letter and of which he had powerful personal experience. Everything tends towards and flows from the Calvary event. It is the ultimate and costly operation of divine mercy. It is the central happening of salvation history. It is the fulcrum of human history. It is the focus of the faithful and the hope of glory.

The mystery of the Passion occupies a seemingly disproportionate amount of the gospel accounts unless we understand that. It seems to take over vast swathes of the liturgical year unless we grasp the secret.

Here, on the little hillside outside the Holy City, hangs the hope of the world. Here, the incarnate deity, the one true God, in the Second Person of the Trinity, the One Eternal Word who created all that is, now enfleshed in the humanity of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Mary, is given over into the hands of wicked men. Is surrendered to the worst that Man can do to Him, is offered on the altar of the cross to the ravages of pain, the agony of betrayal and the death that is the common lot of fallen Man.

Here on Mount Moriah, where with Abraham and Isaac, God spared the Son of Man, Man does not spare the Son of God.

From this unlikely throne He issues pardon to His persecutors and promises Paradise to the penitent. He gives His Blessed Mother to the Church.

Here the King of Kings and Lord of Lords follows His lost sheep of the race of Adam into the pit, through the door of mortality into the maw of death and the malign power of the rebel lord of hell. And so, in the midst of what seems tragedy and defeat and disappointment and desolation, begins the overthrow of the power of sin and the destruction of death. Here, beyond the dereliction, grows the burgeoning triumph which will emerge in the astonishing and eternal victory of the Third Day. This is the turning point of time, the hinge of history. When we come to Mass, we need remember that, however lousy the priest is, what happens here, even on the most makeshift altar, is nothing less than the re-presentation of that moment, that sacrifice of God, that supreme love that offers us salvation, the death that leads to glory, the Life and Love that sweeps us up into Paradise, absolved, purified and welcomed home.

ALL FOR JESUS? This, after all, is the field where the treasure lies.

The road to the miracle of the Third Day always passes through Calvary.

That's why the priest puts that sign on our box.