



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Easter Year B

The Long and Winding Road

Readings: Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19, Ps 4, 1 John 2: 1-5, Luke 24: 35-48

I trust that you will forgive me if, in the light of my recent peregrinations, deviate from the set texts today.

*Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heet*

*The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.*

I know you like a bit of culture here. This is the most famous text in the history of pilgrimage. It is, of course, the opening of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' - a landmark in English Literature and the bane of O Level boys of my generation.

The story is simple but complex. Spring, the end of the miseries of winter, puts a spring in everyone's step, nature awakes, the desire to travel again and see the world is reborn.

Their destiny is not Fuerteventura or some beach side debauch but rather a holy site, in this case Canterbury, shrine of the martyr, Thomas A Becket. So, it is not a holiday in the modern sense but rather HOLY DAYS in the old meaning – days dedicated to God.

The format is simple. They travel together. They pray together. They share their stories on the Way. From the pub in Southwark where they begin, to the shrine in Canterbury, their aim is to encounter God and to thank the blessed martyr for his prayers for the sick.

What you discover on a journey is that, in some strange way, it mirrors, in microcosm, the journey, the adventure of our life. We are on a long and winding road to the Presence and, as we go we find that we are not only seeking some famous point of spiritual geography but seeking the very meaning of our lives. We are seeking to find who we truly are in the company of fellow seekers and in the sight of God.

Most of our lives are predominantly superficial – lived on the surface – the deep goes on beneath either unexplored or unrevealed. Pilgrimage blows that wide open. We are in the company of great needs and great love. We are bonded by a common purpose. We cannot nor will wish to escape one another's company for seven whole days and nights.

We inevitably share our stories and our journeying thus far. We become known, really known, by others as well as by God and we come to see, in the reflection of their eyes and hearts, how much we are loved by God, how dearly He longs for us to love and serve Him in one another and how much he longs to wash us of the grubbiness of sin and embrace His beautiful holiness.

The journey is thus just part of the whole.

Last week, as most of you know, our pilgrim group came to a place – Lourdes – a once upon a time one horse mountain village – to the memory of a nothing unknown peasant child – to a cleft in a rock which you would pass a thousand times and never notice.....unless

Unless this were indeed the place chosen by Our Lady Immaculate to reveal herself and, in the faithfulness of little Bernadette, lead millions to this sacred spot to touch the bare rock, to wash in the springs, to offer the Sacrifice of Christ and to sing the songs of home, the eternal destination.

Here we celebrated the great liturgies, aware that we are not simply part of a small local community of faithful but members of the enormous family that is, spread throughout time and space, the Universal Church.

Here we knelt in the silence of our hearts before the place of extraordinary revelation.

Here there were the moments of exhilaration as we climbed together, with excited children, into the mountains and breathed the rare air and touched the distant snowfields.

Here we approached the Mercy Seat of God's priceless love and absolution and reconciliation.

Here we played hard on the Prairie meadows, racing, ball chasing, enjoying the physical encounter and the whoops of joyful laughter.

Here on the same Prairie we followed the Stations, the Via Dolorosa, led by our children, in the characters of the Passion, utterly focussed and in rapt concentration.

In the pre – Dawn dark, we ascended the hill of the High Stations watching the sun rise over the sleeping town and offered the eternal sacrifice.

In the evening, candle -lit, ranked in thousands, we processed the Domain along the racing silver riverbank and hymned Our Lady, Immaculate and glorious.

In quiet moments of the night we searched the Word together and shared the depths of Faith.

In sudden moments of release and revelation we were washed by unexpected tears.

These were moments of renewal, of reconciliation, of revival, the rekindling of our hope, the sparking anew of the fire of love upon the altar of our hearts.

So, for the rest of our lives we are travelling still but know the place of our arrival is secure in all eternity. The days we spend together we will never forget and we will return to them often in times of dark and difficulty as well as great moments of holy joy. Our bond of fellowship will be unbroken unless we recklessly choose to take the other road to ruin and to loss.

At Lourdes Our Lady calls us to repentance, to putting our lives right with God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Sacrament of Liberation I call it because it frees us up to serve Our Lord unburdened by the weight of sin. Our

Blessed Mother encourages us to wash in the spring of hope, to bathe in the river of life, to drink from the rock along the Way, which is Christ.

We are in Lourdes because we want to stand with St Bernadette and listen to Mary as she proclaims the divinity and sovereignty of Christ. We are in Lourdes because we want to become lifelong pilgrims to the shrine of the Presence, faithful disciples of the Christ who is Jesus. We are in Lourdes because we want to become the people He made us to be. Everything we do on this sacred journey tends towards that end and we are each other's companions, fellow seekers of the divine, grateful children of the one true God, part of the universal family of the Church which He called into being to witness to Him in the world.

How exciting is that?

In the process we will work and walk and witness. We will sacrifice and sing praise. We will follow the Via Dolorosa of His suffering through to the miracle of the Third Day. We will minister to one another with His words of encouragement. We will play and sing and shout 'glory' as excited children of God's grace. We will unburden our souls to Him and seek His healing of our failures in love. We will know the delight of companionship of our fellow travellers on this sovereign way. We will experience, at moments unexpected, the knowledge of the surrounding prayers of the Saints of God, our heavenly family. We will return home exhausted by the intensity of His love and, with a bit of luck, shining with His Light.