



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Vigil Mass, Christmas Eve

Seen and Unseen

Readings: Isaiah 62: 1-5, Ps 88, Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25, Matthew 1: 1-25

As most of you know, I have now had Parkinsons for over a decade.

I am very fortunate with my doctors and my drug regime, not to mention the love and support of Family and Parish and friends.

I enjoy regular monitoring of my condition in several ways, both technological and human. My favourite is the quarterly questionnaire which covers every aspect of body and soul. It is a kind of medical confessional. My favourite question is always the one that asks me: 'Do you see things that aren't really there?'

In the early days I replied 'NO ! - They are really there. The fact that you can't see them is not my fault.' One rapidly learns that bureaucracy has no sense of humour and a visit from the men in white coats was narrowly avoided. I wont tire you with the casual flippancy that led to an hilarious invitation to the Incontinence Clinic.

Well, back to the seeing things. This is not evidence of a supernatural encounter but rather a testament to geriatric eyesight. I was in one of those enticingly cheap supermarkets when I saw a Christmas jumper displaying the legend,

'EAT, DRINK, SLEEP, REPENT' -

At last, I thought, a brand that has got some sense of the season.

I was on the point of purchasing at the till while sharing my excitement with a

bemused fellow customer when she pointed out to me that the 'N' was just a badly stitched 'A'. For 'REPENT' read 'REPEAT'.

Far from being the clarion cry of the Christmas Gospel it was merely another invitation to the remorseless tedium of the modern materialist Christmas – two months prep, two days binge, two days beached on sofa waiting for it to end. We, brothers and sisters, are here in spite of that because we have grasped something of the transformative otherness of Christmas. To see ourselves as the jumper truly puts it (Eat Drink Sleep Repeat) is to see ourselves merely as temporary recycling machines doomed to consume and transform all into waste product until the day dawns when we too will be recycled as no more than, once animated and now inert, compost.

For followers of Christ, today, tonight is an ever and always assertion of Faith in the transformation of the destiny of mortal man. This little wasting sack of mortality has been created by God and now, in the face of our finite future, has been invested by God with His Presence in the person of His Son, the Lord Christ, Jesus.

Because of that INCARNATION, the enfleshment of the Divine, because of that combination of the two natures in the One Person of the Trinitarian Godhead, Man can even yet, as the old calypso put it, 'live forever more because of Christmas Day.'

We, and I venture, even the most hardened atheists, have a perception that we are more than an agglomeration of molecules, more interesting than a mere quintessence of dust. This is because, as Scripture tells us, we are made in the image of God. Only our sin muddies the picture, blurs the image, deceives the onlooker. Even in our times of deepest darkest doubt we cannot avoid the intimation of immortality that is part of the very fabric of our being and inbuilt remnant wisdom of the soul. We know we are made for more than this.

So, on this most holy night, we trek under the chilly gloom of a late December sky, to this house of prayer, - to this place where we can tune in to the divine wavelength

and send our fragile signal star-ward and find ourselves Bethlehem bound to that
'lowly cattle shed' - to the child in the arms of Mary.

Here, He waits for us, stragglers of uncertain mind, drawn for a thousand different
reasons to this little band of historical nobodies kneeling before the manger.

He waits for us as we join our frail and trembling voices with the song of the angels,
by most of us unseen.

He waits for us earthbound mortals, at the sanctuary step, to reach across the
scarcely visible borderland of time into His eternity.

He waits, arms open, to welcome the weary traveller limping homeward, to heal our
hidden wounds, to invest our muddled mortality with His immortality and embrace
our fragile humanity with His divinity.

Do we see things that others do not see? Kneeling before the Christ Child, we catch
glimpses of the eternal realities too oft obscured by the tyrannies of time.

Because of this we recognise, in that ragged fool who stares back at us from the
bathroom mirror in the dawning of the new day, not a sack of briefly animated dung
but a bemerded son of Adam, daughter of Eve, embraced by Jesus becoming, in the
arms of Christ's Blessed Mother, a child of God, - in Him our eternal destiny restored.

And then, like the shepherds, we **must** tell the story. It is the least that we can do for
others and for Jesus.

Next year I want a jumper that reads simply

REPENT AND REJOICE AND RECEIVE AND REPEAT - ALWAYS

R A R A R A R A

HALLELUJAH !

AMEN !