



## **27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C : A Bleazer**

**A Homily by Fr Robbie Low**

***Readings: Habakkuk 1: 2-3; 2:2-4, Is 94, 2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14, Luke 17: 5-10***

I suspect that if I asked if anyone in this congregation knew what a 'bleazer' is I would draw a blank. Certainly St Paul doesn't mention one in this Sunday's passage from his second Letter to Timothy.

We have been working our way through this letter in the daily lection and it helps to know the who and why and where of the text, I always think.

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of Timothy in those early years of mission. Born in Lystra in Galatia, his family, mother and grandmother both Jewish but his father a gentile and had not had Timothy circumcised. We know that the womenfolk and Timothy were converted on Paul and Barnabas first mission there and when Paul returned some years later, with Silas as his second in command, the friendship, master and disciple and eventually co-missioner relationship took off.

From the year 52AD onward, Timothy appears, shy and not always in the best of health, as Paul's emissary, ground breaker, secretary, co-author and essential companion. Paul told the Philippians – 'there is no-one like him'.

And it is clear that Paul left him as Bishop of Ephesus, where he was eventually martyred at the age of eighty for preaching against the old pagan shibboleth that first incurred the wrath of his master – 'Diana – goddess of the Ephesians'.

It is, touchingly, Timothy that Paul calls to him when he is imprisoned in Rome and, as it turns out, awaiting execution. He asks Timothy to bring his parchments, his cloak and Mark with him – and come before Winter sets in.

So that is the setting of today's reading and you, who have pilgrimaged with me to Rome, will recall two of the most moving places to discover and pray are the house in Rome where Paul lived for two years of house arrest and from which this letter was written....

AND.....the Abbey of the Three Fountains outside Rome where the Apostle was eventually taken to be executed.

It is from the house in the Via Lata beneath Santa Maria church in the Corso, next the great Doria Pamphili Palace, that this letter went to Timothy.

He exhorts Timothy to 'fan into flame the gift that God gave you when I laid hands on you'. That gift, Paul goes on, was not timidity but love and power and self-discipline.

Paul, who has been in epic and unrelenting missionary mode for nearly twenty years may be recognising just how exhausting the ministry is, especially in what will turn out to be 250 years of adverse circumstances and regular persecutions.

It is easy for the initial fire blazing in our hearts, from that first transforming encounter with Christ, to dull down into a gentle warming glow and then gradually suffocate in its own ash. Paul is not unsympathetic but he is keen to ensure that his heir and successor is alert to the danger of spiritual burn out. The Christian life is a marathon and not a sprint.

Paul employs the imagery of fire because it is that fire of Pentecost, the flame of the Holy Spirit, that powers the Church. He is also aware of the meaning of the Greek word for fire = 'PUR' – the purifying love of God which redeems us from that alternative fire of Hell – or Gehenna, as Jesus called it, a reference to the smouldering rubbish dump on the south side of Jerusalem where the future was sacrificed in pagan slaughter of the innocent.

So the fire which has been lit by the Holy Spirit may need an occasional poke. It will certainly need refuelling regularly but if it is to roar up and catch light in others then I refer you to the 'bleazer'.

A 'bleazer' is a Geordie term, taught me by my beloved mother-in-law. We have always had coal fires – yes I know that's now a criminal offence – and when I was struggling to light or revive my flagging efforts at combustion, Iris introduced the bleazer and one was made for me. It is a simple piece of strong metal, with insulated handle, shaped to fit the fireplace and shut off all extraneous source of air and light. The bottom of the grate is then opened and the flagging fire sucks in its vital lifeline

with tremendous power and the whole affair, within seconds, is a roaring inferno.

What has that got to do with Paul & Timothy? Well, the image is useful. All of us run into times when the impetus is missing, the energy is down, the enthusiasm low or non-existent. We can poke the fire in desperation, riddle the grate in the confessional, try to bung a few more nuggets of divine wisdom on in the hope that they will catch and not be drowned by the ash of former glories. But what we really need is a bleazer – a time of retreat or pilgrimage – when everything else is shut out and the remnant of the glowing embers of our faith depending desperately, immediately, privately and intensely on the single simple source of our life and energy, can draw the mighty rushing wind of Pentecost through our upper room and set our heads and hearts on fire with divine love. That alone can ‘fan into flame’ those wonderful gifts of God that you and I, like Timothy, were given when first God laid his hand on us through the ministry of Christ’s church and the heirs of the Apostles.