



29th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C: The Long Haul

A homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Exodus 17: 8-13, Ps 120, 2 Timothy 3: 14-4:2, Luke 18:8

In the high summer of 1979 I arrived, bright eyed and bushy tailed as the dynamic young curate at All Saints, Poplar, whose spire overlooked the old East India Dock, and, on one edge led onto Chrisp Street Market and, on the other, led down the Blackwall Tunnel and those strange people who lived south of the river. I was ready to convert the world in record time and would brook no delay.

Among my colleagues were an American who would go on to become London's leading sex therapist, a delightful academic who was an expert on Augustine and lived like a monk and two elderly women church workers. One was Sr Grace, formerly i/c Mother and Baby homes and a great neighbour who later became a godparent to one of children. The other was a quiet, physically insignificant woman in an old brown raincoat whom you might pass every day and not notice. Daphne Jones

was a retired nurse. She had come, from a leading county family in Gloucestershire, to work in the East End before the war. She had served under the legendary Rector , Fr. (later Bishop) Mark Hodson, assisted the Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine (they of 'Call the Midwife' fame), begun the rescue of prostitutes from the docks that was then jointly run with the famous Fr. Joe and then simply stayed on as Church Worker. She was known and loved by members of the Royal Family as well as the whole parish of Poplar. If Daff said she was off to the Duke of Devonshire it might equally have been to the local pub as to Chatsworth house. Daff never missed Mass. Visited assiduously.

Had an eye out for lame dogs. Lived in extraordinary simplicity – her only luxury was a few porcelain Beatrix Potter figures given her by friends over the years. Her mailing list was industrial in size and if your birthday got onto it, you were on it *sine die*.

Daff taught me a lot about God and about ministry – her unspoken and exemplary lessons on humility took a lot longer to sink in.

I recall one day her returning to see one of her 'girls' – she was regularly visited by women she had rescued from prostitution, now respectable married cheerful mums and grannies.

Daff was beaming. I remarked on how cheerful she seemed.

'Yes, my dear,' she beamed, 'things have finally come right with the Davies family.'

'Praise the Lord', I replied.

Then, as an afterthought, I added 'How long has that taken then?'

Daff paused as if doing some hasty mental arithmetic.

'Oh, about forty years' , she said.

It is a punchline that has informed my prayer life ever since.

While there is always a godly urgency for the Gospel mission, there is also a need to recognise that His timing is not necessarily ours. We, who are chased by the hostile chariot of our mortality, require instant solutions. God, being eternal, has a better overview of the medium and longer term.

What He requires of us is to be faithful and, like the woman in the Gospel, go on praying, battering away at the door, storming heaven with our intentions, pouring our love out at the foot of the Cross for those on our hearts and never to give up. No prayer, no act of love is ever lost if offered at the altar of His sacrifice. My urgency and His patience are complementary elements of His mercy.

The other thing we might notice in today's Old Testament reading is that we need each other. When Moses prays over the battle ground that will determine the future, indeed the very survival, of his people, he has help. Holding up his arms in the traditional Orantes/Praying position is incredibly tiring. Aaron and Hur stand beside him all day supporting his prayer, lifting his weary arms. By this is the victory won. It is what you do here every time you pray for your parish priests. You share the burden. You understand that we are in it for the long haul. Only by this teamwork can the victory be won and Amalek, the forces of darkness be overcome. Moses prays for the whole day like this. We are to do likewise until the sun sets and our day is over. As the leader of his people, God's People, the priest prays, arms outstretched and imploring Heaven to grant the victory. You can't always see the whole spiritual picture but, by your

faithfulness, your priest, seated and secured on the Rock that is Christ, may have his flagging arms held up that he may pray the Victory of the Cross over the hosts of the enemy and that , together, all the days of our life, we may strive to win that entry to the Land of the Promise for all the People of God. Whether it takes forty minutes or forty years.