



2nd Sunday of Easter Year A: Fake News

Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Acts 2: 42-47, Ps 118, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20: 19-31

‘ History is the propaganda of the victors’

This much quoted and now revered and ancient pearl of wisdom turned up first, apparently, in the modern novel ‘Captain Corelli’s Mandolin’. So much for truth.

The importance of capturing the narrative of the past cannot be overstated. We are currently deep in battles over gender, race, empire, borders, religions. These are fought out, both in the groves of academe and increasingly on our streets, in an effort to recapture the past for one or other, usually malign, political view.

We think we live uniquely in an age of ‘spin’ and ‘fake news’.

This is a category of which, outside wartime necessity for propaganda, most of us were blissfully unaware until the regular and exemplary reminders of President Trump. But ‘fake news’ is the regular stuff of history.

We are groomed into believing, for purely political reasons following the successive energy crises of our lifetime, on one side that Islam is a religion of peace OR, on the other, a repressive philosophy kept in power by brainwashing and brutality.

That mass immigration is good for OR fatal to the economic prosperity and social cohesion of a country.

That there are only two genders, male and female, OR a veritable kaleidoscope of incomprehensible options.

To go back in history.....that huge parts of France were a natural part of the sovereign lands of English kings OR that the 'nobles' who fought this dynastic squabble out, at the cost of oceans of yeoman blood, were simply greedy and brutal warlords, dignifying their wickedness by draping it in religious symbolism and affecting a demeanour of romantic chivalry.

The truth or untruth of these conflicting options are not merely academic but, in the age of mass media, the essential battlegrounds of a civilisation's self-understanding and survival.

In this light, let me look briefly at the Gospel reports on the immediate aftermath of Jesus' Resurrection.

The story of the women folk, angels, empty tomb, meeting the Risen Lord etc. are, of course, to the thinking of the day, unsustainable. A woman, as any good Taliban will tell you, is not qualified to be a witness. She is too much a creature of emotions and hormonal fluctuation. Anything she says must be regarded with deep scepticism. Such was the order of the day.

But the authorities are also deeply aware that this 'story', this 'obvious fabrication', has the power to disturb the status quo and set in train events of serious consequence for those in power and the delicate national and imperial balance.

The 'lies' of the women and the prophetic 'lies' of Jesus must be countered swiftly and plausibly. The powers that be needed, to put it bluntly, 'a better class of lie'. So the guards, who, understandably, have fled in terror from the angels, now stand in terror before their paymasters. There is only one deal on the table that suits both parties. Hard cash and absolution for the guards, no angels and the agreement that the narrative should be of an apostolic 'body snatching'.

FAKE NEWS my friends, FAKE NEWS.

And if fake news is too obvious a route then 'spin' is the next handy resort.

And here we may encounter, even in the Gospels themselves, more than a hint of reassuringly human 'spin' – the desire for the story to reflect us favourably.

Remember the account of the race to the empty tomb, as recorded by John. We are reminded that John got there first. Peter, puffing and blowing behind is, John acknowledges, the first to go in BUT.....when John goes in he not only sees but BELIEVES – another first. This is the same John whose mother is seen badgering Jesus for the best seats at the Cabinet table for her sons – much to the fury and disgust of the other disciples.

As John is also, self -designated, the disciple whom Jesus loves, is well connected in Jerusalem and is actually present at the Cross, you might reasonably conclude that he is a more obvious choice than Peter for leadership. Instead Peter retains the central apostolic role given him by Jesus as both Prime Minister and i/c Foreign Affairs (Mission). James, the third member of the triumvirate, heads up home affairs (the Jerusalem Church).

John is 'palmed off' with the role of caring for Mary and, default, writing the mystical and cosmic gospel that balances the Canon of Scripture over against the day to day reportage of the other three Synoptic Gospels. 'Palmed off' ? Jesus knew exactly what He was doing – even if John, for the moment, did not understand.

SO- on to today's Gospel.....When Jesus appears to the disciples in the Upper Room and on the Emmaus Road, Thomas is absent.

Remember that when Jesus was bound for Jerusalem and all the other disciples initially refused out of fear to join Him, Thomas alone volunteered to accompany Him. So, while all the others are holed up, fearing the knock on the door and arrest, Thomas is out in town, fearless. He misses the appearance of the Risen Lord and he is swift to question the veracity of his fellow disciples' account.

This, he believes is 'fake news'. Thomas wants 'hard facts'.

He is a bloke's bloke.

When, eight days later, Christ appears to all the 'team', Thomas is there.

Jesus invites him to touch His wounds. Thomas no longer needs to. He has seen and witnessed.

And he knows that this is no longer 'fake news' but rather the manifestation of the Truth and he proclaims, 'My Lord and my God'..

It's true. No fake. No spin.

Christ is risen, the Apostolic band declare.

And we reply, He is Risen indeed. Hallelujah.

We are, with Thomas, to take this Good News, to the ends of the Earth.

And we too kneel before The Risen One and declare, with Thomas,

'MY LORD AND MY GOD'.