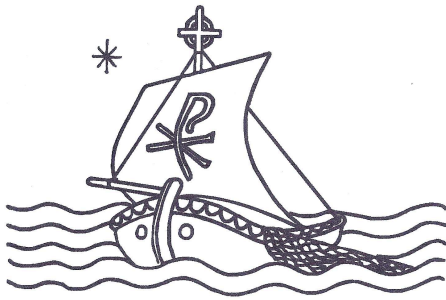




28th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Isaiah 25:6-10a, Ps 23, Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20, Matthew 22:1-14

Over the last couple of years I have had the pleasure of following Fr Patrick van der Vorst's daily meditations on the Gospel on his website Christian Art. Fr. Patrick is a former auctioneer and high end London art specialist who now operates this remarkable ministry alongside his work at Westminster Cathedral.

The meditations are always good and the objects and pictures often very moving and spiritually provocative and inspiring.

I was particularly struck this week by the one on the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. One Rosary bead, a tiny silver gilded ball, made in the early 16th century by Flemish craftsmen, opens to reveal two scenes, carved in minute intricacy in boxwood and round their borders, in Latin, the Scriptural text which they illuminate. It is simply stunning.

As Fr Patrick explains, the revelation is really a reminder of what depth of the experience of Christ lies inside the mystery of each bead of even the humblest rosary if we pray it deeply with our Blessed Mother, that supreme heart of love for Jesus.

This particular bead though leads us back to a much earlier form of the Rosary because it is the final bead in our chaplet and it is not the Coronation of the Virgin. In the earliest rosary that mystery and that of

the Assumption were coupled together in the penultimate bead. The final mystery was the Last Judgement.

And so, in this tiny piece of extraordinary and terrible beauty, we see, in one half, the warning that we do not know the hour....

And in the other that we will all stand before the tribunal of Christ.

It's like having your own miniature of Michaelangelo's great altar wall fresco from the Sistine Chapel.

In the first scene, a family dining table, we see Death burst in. One man reels in horror, another knocks over the jug, a third is gasping his last breath. 'Stay awake' the Gospel legend reminds us 'because we do not know the hour'.

In the other half of the bead we see the Final Judgement, the glorious tribunal of the Risen, Ascended and Glorified Lord as He determines the eternal destiny of each soul.

We watch in awe at the terror and the triumph of the revelation of the majesty of God.

All of this is, of course, a long way from the modern popular discursus on Jesus or the Four Last Things – Death and Judgement, Heaven and Hell. Go and listen to the average sermon at the Crematorium and you will find yourself wallowing in a saccharine and sentimental rehearsal of the glorious merits of the deceased, little if any praise of God, no call for his mercy and a projection of the departed as translated instantly to a fairytale heaven – a sort of celestial Lanzarote. And all this regardless of the wishes, choices, beliefs or actions of the deceased.

The little rosary bead and, I need hardly add, today's Gospel, brings us up short against the real Jesus and the truth about our living and dying.

While the Crematorium hireling is bleating his soggy and implausible comfort, it is the task of the community of the Faith and her teachers and preachers to listen to the Lord. Jesus is no fluffy bunny here.

We are introduced again and again to the hard choices of this life.

In parable after parable Jesus outlines the way home and the consequences of not taking it. The wheat and the weeds. The Last Judgement. The rude and dismissive wedding guests. The treacherous tenants in the Vineyard. Dives and Lazarus and so on and on.

The little bead, therefore, asks us the great existential questions.

God or no God? Our fundamental belief and trust in Him

Do we live according to His ways? Our ethics

Are we ready if the Angel of Death called today? Our Spiritual

preparation Have we been too busy to go to the Wedding Feast? Do

we miss Mass? Have we turned up in our 'filthy rags' of sin and not

bothered to clean up and put on the wedding garment? Not going to

confession Have we cared for the poor, the lonely, the imprisoned?

Works of mercy. Have we followed the path of penitence and

thanksgiving – Confession and Eucharist? The twin engines of our faith

and the place of our primary encounters with Jesus Christ

Do we believe that Christ died for us on the Cross and that, without that sacrifice, we are lost? Our core Credo

Do we love other people enough to be urgent in calling them homeward?

Our mission.

The Crematorium hireling may be content to give false comfort and collect his fee but the Church of Christ is wedded, by His love, to the Truth.

And as we contemplate the hard words of Jesus and reflect on our own preparedness and willingness to live and love for Him, let us ask Him for the courage to speak and live that Gospel truth in our time among those we love and to all those He has given us to love and serve in this life.