



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Christmas Midnight Mass

You have only to say 'Yes'

Readings: Isaiah 9: 1-7, Ps 56, Titus 2: 11-14, Luke 2: 1-14

In 1974 John le Carre published the first of the great Cold War trilogy novels about spymaster George Smiley. Capitalism was in crisis, educated youth was allying itself to the Marxist critique. Western parliaments, trades unions and government offices were heavily infiltrated by friends of the Stalinist tyranny that had, for half a century, engulfed Eastern Europe. No betting man would have staked much on the survival of the democratic West against the burgeoning militarism of the Soviet Empire. And yet.....

There is a scene in the televised final part of Le Carre's work where an old exiled Estonian general, Vladimir, meets the son of his old martyred comrade. Vladimir has a task for the young man. The young man, Villem, a transcontinental truck driver, is naturalised and trying to live a normal English life. There is no hope for a free Estonia and he doesn't want to get involved. Vladimir wants Villem to carry a message, nothing more nothing less. The old man believes the import of the message is so profound that it will change everything. Villem regards him as a deluded old man. Villem loves and respects Vladimir but knows that the culture and the tide of

history are against him. He quietly and utterly reasonably refuses his old friend.

As Villem's truck pulls into a lay-by the old general suddenly seizes his young protégé by the lapels and pulls him face to face and roars: 'In the making of history God uses some very strange and inappropriate creatures. YOU ARE GOING TO BE ONE OF THEM!'

Villem does as he is asked and, though Vladimir does not live to see it, the message really is the great game changer. It is the beginning of the unravelling of the most vicious murder machine in human history, the Soviet Empire.

Le Carre wrote all this at the low point of the West yet within fifteen years the Berlin Wall had fallen and the states of Eastern Europe, little Estonia included, were on the road to freedom. The impossible had become reality. Such would have been the experience of Pope St. John-Paul II in his beloved Poland. Years under the Nazi jackboot then under the God hating Communists. Yet in all this time he never doubted the inevitable triumph of truth and freedom and the vindication of the Faith against the Marxist materialists who sought to reduce man to stuff and playthings of a godless state. Who would have imagined that this sometime quarry worker and amateur actor would, by following the message of the Gospel, live to sit on the throne of Peter and be instrumental in the downfall of the great tyranny.

Why this detour through recent history on such a night as this?

We have listened to the story of the shepherds and no doubt had our fill of nativities. We should never forget that the shepherds were men of their time, poor men, men living in a land under the rule of foreign tyranny, longing for freedom, longing for the promised fulfilment of God. Nothing in the culture or the tide of their times suggested an early solution to their difficulties. Yet there they were, suddenly ambushed at their place of work by messengers and not just any messengers. The angelic host of Heaven, sky filled and overwhelming, leant down to these unconsidered and inappropriate creatures to give them the message that all time and all humanity had waited to hear. They were to go to the rendezvous of God, the child in Mary's arms, and, having done so, pass on that life changing, universe restoring, man-freeing message.

This message will change the course of history. You must receive and pass it on.

So now to us tonight. We may be here because of deep faith. We may be here to keep the family peace. We may be here out of sentiment or nostalgia. All of us will know that we live in a culture where God is out of fashion, where the hope of the reconversion of Europe seems out of the question, where men mock our Faith and walk away. But what may seem impossible to us is not impossible to God and our task is no different from that of the heroes of Faith who have gone before us – to get the message and pass it on. Whether we are unconsidered nameless shepherds or great saints of God, our sacred task is to be the resistance movement to the tyranny of sin and death and do our bit to bring in the glorious liberation of the Kingdom of God. That takes courage and it takes faith and men should

not leave it to their womenfolk. By the simple message of Jesus, God become man, we know that we can change the world.

We are, brothers and sisters, the 'not so secret' agents of the love of God. I am not able to reach out and hold each of you by the lapels and look, face to face, into your eyes but if I could I would simply say this: 'In the making of history God uses some very strange and inappropriate creatures. YOU ARE GOING TO BE ONE OF THEM!'

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