



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Christmas Day

Wanting to be Mary

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

I have never been a great fan of nativities.

Don't get me wrong.... THE NATIVITY – great. But T-towelled, tinselled tinies, dressing-gowned and straw-draped, bringing out the sentimental side in the wider tribe of rellies and regulars. Not really my scene.

My therapist has suggested, in a non-directive kind of way, that this may go back to my own childhood and my single starring role in this infantile rehearsal of the Incarnation. Would anyone care to guess what part I landed? No, not the ass.

Brothers and sisters, my oh so perceptive teacher discerned an unusual talent in a seven year old boy and duly cast me as.....King Herod.

I loved it. I got to be Abanazar oily with those gormless kings.

I got to shout and stamp my foot in fury at my terrified courtiers (most of 1C) and publicly plot mayhem and murder on a truly epic scale. I have never seen the part cast since – obviously an unrepeatable performance – and, perhaps due to my 'method acting' approach to the part, small children

have always been frightened of me since, for which I am, on the whole, grateful.

This changes a little with the onset of grandparenthood. So it was with some amusement that I heard, last Christmas, that my three year old granddaughter, Amelie, had insisted that her mum take her to church dressed as Mary. (This is a church where the Sunday Mass has standing room only and is packed with young families. There is a long queue to be Mary and, at three, you are not even in the queue.) Amelie had been asked to be an angel. She told mummy she was Mary. Mummy complied.

On arriving at church, a chaotic kindergarten of costumed kiddies, mum was grabbed by a desperate parish priest. 'We have no Mary! Can I ask Amelie?' Amelie met the request graciously and simply replied, 'YES'.

There she sat, Queen of Apostles, for twenty minutes cradling Jesus, amidst the stable chaos, utterly serene. On leaving church, Amelie announced that she would be Mary next year too. Mummy explained this was beyond unlikely.

Fast forward one year to last week. Amelie is four. Insisting that she will be Mary, not histrionically, just matter of fact. The team arrive at the Nativity gathering point. The organising teacher rushes up to Amelie and mummy. This year's Mary has had a meltdown and is refusing to go on. Would Amelie be willing to be Mary? 'YES'

There she sits, the second Eve, the new Ark of the Covenant, cradling Jesus gently, smiling sweetly amidst disorientated camels, lost sheep and adoring and adorable angels.

I tell you this, not as an extension of boring you with grandad's boasting book, because there is a simple lesson in this for all of us who have long outgrown t-towels and old dressing gowns.

Amelie wanted to be Mary. Was it so uncanny that she knew she would be? We, of all people, should not be surprised. We, of all people, should want to be Mary because we are the Church, her children. We, of all people, should expect to be asked to be open the Holy Spirit of God. We, of all people, should be ready to respond, when asked, to what we are asked to do for God. No histrionics, no hissy fits, no protestations of inadequacy, no buck passing. Just that quiet longing expectation and that simple 'YES'.

We, of all people, should not be surprised to be asked to bring Jesus into the world and, amid the chaos of the stable, with the enthusiastic locals or the foreign visitors, in the political melee, against the cynical cruelties of power, on the refugee road, during the long years of quietude in the old familiar town, battered by the terrors of the way of sorrows, into the darkness of death and the glorious mystery of the Third Day, to love Him above everything and present Him to the world.

The question at the heart of each nativity is a simple one. Do you come here wanting to be Mary? Do you come here ready to say, 'YES'.