



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday of Lent Year B

The mystery of the Temple

Readings: *Genesis 22: 1-2, 9-13, 15-18, Ps 115, Romans 8: 31-34, Mark 9: 2-10*

In the chaos that followed the suicide of the Emperor Nero three successors came and went in the space of a year. The eventual triumph of Vespasian founded a new dynasty, the Flavians, and set the scene for the disaster that was to engulf Jerusalem in the year AD 70. The new emperor had, as his first priority, to suppress the independent Jewish state that had emerged as Roman grip on the near east had loosened. Trapped in the Holy City vast numbers of pilgrims to the Passover watched as factional infighting and famine weakened the defence. On the surrounding hillsides up to 500 Jews a day were crucified in full view of the city.

When Titus, Vespasian's son, finally entered the city he headed for the burning Temple building, keen to save it and to see what lay inside. The prophecy of Jesus to the Women of Jerusalem, as he carried His Cross on the Via Dolorosa, had come to pass. The history of this tragedy is recorded in the History of Josephus, the Jewish chronicler, and in terrifying graphic detail on the Arch of Titus still standing on the Via Sacra in Rome.

Titus wanted to know what lay within the Holy of Holies, the sacred space open only to the High Priest of Israel and to him only once a year on the Day of Atonement. What did the presence of the God of this peculiar and singular people look like?

Had Titus been able to wind back history and enter the first Temple he would have discovered several things. The Ark of the Covenant bearing the Word of God. The Rod of Aaron. A jar of Manna. The oil of anointing. The Temple that he burned down afforded him little understanding of the Faith he fought but the question 'What is God like?' continues to haunt the philosophical quest of Man.

The answer resides, in symbolic form, in the contents of the Holy Place. It is finally revealed on the Mountain of Transfiguration in today's Gospel. The Ark of the Covenant is, for us, both a title for Our Lady and a reference to the Church of which she is the ikon. Both are bearers of the Word of God. This is no longer on tablets of stone but the Real Presence of God, the Second Person of the Trinity revealed in flesh and blood, revealed in our humanity in Jesus.

The Rod of Aaron points to the great High Priesthood of Christ. The Atonement, the reconciliation of God and Man is achieved, once for all, not in the blood of bulls or goats, but in the Blood of the Lamb of the Eternal Passover, Christ Jesus Our Lord. From this eternal priest all Christian priesthood emanates and the eternal sacrifice made 'once, only once and once for all' can be continually offered.

Within the sacred space is hidden the Jar of Manna, that bread from Heaven which sustained the Exodus in the long years of wilderness and wandering on the journey to the Promised Land. In this miracle and mystery is hidden the key to the Christian understanding of the Mass. Here, transubstantiated and proclaimed from the altar of sacrifice, is the true bread from Heaven now, metamorphosed by the Holy Spirit of God, into the Body of the sacrificed Saviour of the world. Here is the Viaticum of souls, food for the journey. Those who would continue the journey into Resurrection, Ascension, Glorification must pass through the Calvary.

And finally there is the Stock of Oil. The anointed One is Christ – that is what it means. So we, as followers of Christ are Christians – anointed ones. It marks our baptism, our confirmation, our calling and our dying. The anointing is for priests, prophets and kings. Every Christian participates in the priesthood of Christ as go-betweens to a fallen world. Every Christian must be a prophet – a witness to and proclaimer of the Word of God. Every Christian, adopted by baptism into Christ, becomes a member of the Royal Family of God.

All these things are revealed in the mystery of the Temple. The Temple destroyed by Titus now remains but a remnant ruined wall. The Temple, of which we speak, is the Body of Jesus – crucified, risen, ascended, glorified.

The hint of this transformation is the central story of today's Gospel. The three disciples are given an insight into the continuity of God's plan in the attendance of Elijah and Moses on the mountain. They are given a vision of Heavenly Glory in the Transfiguration itself. They long, as Peter puts it, to tabernacle this experience. They want to stay in the Presence. It is a noble

ambition. It is our ambition. How long we could endure the blinding light of the eternal glory and terrifying awe of the unveiled Presence in our unpurified state is a matter of brief conjecture. In His mercy Christ has not left us comfortless or without transfigured signs of that reality. We proclaim the Real Presence in the Mass. In adoration of the Blessed Sacrament we expose the Bread of Life in the sunburst of the Monstrance.

This year, in the life of the Church, we are focussing, in our Lent Groups and in National events, on recapturing our sense of awe at the mystery and majesty of God's self-revelation in the Real Presence of Christ. We are invited to stand, with the disciples and ancient prophets, on the mountaintop and marvel at His glory and the future of redeemed Man. We need to recapture that amazing vision of the divine light and life and transfiguration if we are to be His witnesses in a darkening world.

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