



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Advent-Year C-December 16th 2018

Readings: Zephaniah 3: 14-18, Psalm 12, Philippians 4: 4-7, Luke 3: 10-18

The life of John the Baptist is a strange one.

He is the last of the prophets. He is the first to recognise Jesus as the Christ. He is born the miracle child of an old and seemingly barren couple amidst signs and wonders and angelic appearances.

He will die a squalid and sudden death at the whim of a tuppenny-ha'penny king whose drunken lust has undone his better judgement.

He is born in the relative luxury of a Temple priest's house. He will spend his adult life as a wandering ascetic, seeking out the desert fastness and the lonely places of the divine encounter.

Of him his grateful father will sing, 'Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel. He has visited his people and set them free.....As for you little child you shall be called a prophet of God the Most High. You shall go ahead of the Lord and prepare His way before Him.'

And two millennia of the faithful have echoed this song every morning in the office of the Church in the Canticle of the Benedictus.

His teaching was simple moral guidance, exhorting people to the corporal works of mercy. To those in positions of authority to play straight and not abuse their power.

In his wildness and strangeness of clothing and diet, he stood out. In his spiritual charisma he drew vast crowds to the banks of the Jordan River with his simple and powerful call to repentance. Something of this striking and unique soul resonated with the ordinary man and they came in battalions to be plunged into the waters and recommit themselves to the God of their fathers.

The Gospel tells us that there was a tangible air of expectation. Could this extraordinary man, with his miraculous birth and potent ministry be the One so long awaited? Was John the Messiah, the Christ of God? What a moment that must have been. How plausible it must all have seemed to this prophet, surrounded by thousands of people hanging on his every word. How easy it would have been for John to usurp the role, to claim the glory, to impersonate the promise.

John is a man of utter integrity. Just as he leaped in the womb at the arrival of Jesus in the womb of Mary, so he points unerringly to Jesus as the One who is to come. In the midst of his own fame, he points out, to all who will listen, that this obscure carpenter from a one horse northern town, born in obscurity, back from exile, Jesus is the Lamb of God, the sacrifice of the eternal Passover, the One whose blood will save the faithful from the Angel of Death.

At the moment when he holds the world in his hands he proclaims that he is not fit to tie the sandal strap of the Messiah, unworthy to be his slave. He is a man of sensational humility. He knows his popularity must be but temporary. Of Jesus he says, 'He must wax. I must wane.' John's whole task is a brief but powerful preparation of the Way of the Lord. He is the fulfilment of the Isaian prophecy. His task is done. 'Look, here comes the Holy One of God.' Our last sight of him will be in Herod's dungeon, punished for telling the truth. Sending a message to Jesus out

of the darkness and despair and doubt of the prison walls. 'Are you the One? Or do we look for another?'

At first unsettling, I always find this message from so great a saint comforting. We all, even the greatest, have our faith tested in the moments of darkness. We need the reassurance of Jesus.....and it comes. Before his summary execution and martyrdom for the Faith, he hears the words of consolation and confirmation. His ministry was utterly faithful. He has fulfilled his sacred calling. He has not been deluded nor lived in vain. He is the last of the prophets. He has unerringly pointed to Jesus and prepared the way for Him in the hearts of men. We love John because, with all its up and downs, excitements and uncertainties, his task is our task too, to point to Jesus and proclaim. 'Behold the Lamb of God.'