



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

UNITY WEEK 2019 St. Petroc Minor Little Petherick

In the years when I had better use of my legs the young people of our Parish, preparing to take disabled children to Lourdes, would dedicate themselves by walking the Saints' Way praying the Rosary. We would offer Mass at the Longstone on St. Breock Down and the following day on the height of Helman Tor before descending the beautiful river valley to Fowey and the churches of St Sampson and St. Finbarr. Two of the first day highlights were the appearance, in a farm gateway, of our own Anne Tarry with a supply of tea and buns out of the boot of her car – a corporal work of mercy – and our visit to this beautiful jewel of a church where we would pray the third joyful mystery, the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I never imagined I would have the privilege of preaching here – my thanks to Fr. Stephen for that treasured gift.

Our service to God tonight is a melding of the gentle rhythm of Evensong, the putting to bed of the day in the company of Our Lady (in the Magnificat) and the saints who wait in the Temple (Simeon and Anna in the Nunc Dimittis) and the less familiar but simple glory of Benediction – the service of the Blessing of His Presence.

To many this form of worship had been written off as Catholic idolatry and, since the 19th century Anglican revival, some quirky extravagance indulged in by C of E mavericks, a bit too high up the candlestick for comfort. (Indeed the 39 Articles of the Church of England still specifically

proscribe this service. Article 28 condemns reservation of the Sacrament and Adoration.)

I want to suggest that, in its simplicity and power, it can be a place of unity and reconciliation and peace.

What brings us all here is that we are followers of Jesus. Each of us, in our own deeply inadequate way, wants to love and serve the Lord in our time and in the place He has put us. We have no higher ambition.

We come to Church to worship and adore Him, to refuel our souls in Word and Sacrament and to encounter the Risen Lord. We seek His Presence. If we do not expect to encounter Him in the Real Presence then I, for one, would stay at home, have a decent roast rib of beef and raise a glass of claret to the memory of 'Good Old Jesus.' We are not simple remembrancers of time past but servants of a living and present Lord. Since the 19th century both Anglican and Methodist teaching and practice has moved back in the Catholic direction of some sense of Real Presence. For some it is a spiritual sense, for others it is truly corporeal. The Anglican formula of a sacrament as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace is different from the Catholic proclamation of the objective reality of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. Our divisions and our difficulties should not mask the fact that as Christians we celebrate the Real Presence. Because the alternative is the 'Real Absence'. We also know where Christ Himself has promised to be truly present – that is in His Body, in the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood. Benediction invites us, pilgrims all, to kneel and adore Him in this transformational reality.

The priest is robed gorgeously – not because he is vain or a dandy but because he is entering the court of the King of Kings and you would not even go to Buckingham Palace in jeans and a t-shirt. He kneels, not a citizen of earth but a subject of the Risen Lord. The sacramental

Presence of the Lord is presented in the glorious golden sunburst of the Monstrance. The Bread of Life radiates His glory as on the mountaintop of the Transfiguration where the disciples beheld the co-inherence of the prophets and the Law and heard of the new Exodus and saw the dazzling light of the world, a foretaste of Heaven, and they prayed to dwell there always.

The golden effulgence of the King's Presence is acknowledged by the incense rising. The gifts of frankincense acclaim Christ as the great High Priest, the

God Man go-between, whose sacrifice reconciles Earth and Heaven.

And a reminder that we are accompanied, as St. John tells us in the Apocalypse, by the prayers of the saints rising as incense at the altar of Heaven.

In that heady mix is sprinkled the third gift of the Magi, myrrh. The death of Christ is offered, the supreme atonement for our sin, the reconciliation of Man with God and the restoration of our original destiny in His eternal Presence.

Before the manifest glory of God we have no need of words any more. We are silent in adoration, bound together by a simple love of Jesus. In this humble simplicity we are united in Christ. Like Peter and James and John we want to stay forever in the Presence.

The priest kneels in homage then raises the Presence wordlessly to bless us and we respond with the Divine Praises, 'Blessed be God...' in heartfelt thanksgiving.

The moment of encounter has passed. We have knelt together in the Presence. We have beheld a foretaste of eternal glory. We have gazed on the mystery of Christ. Now, like the three disciples, we must return from the mountaintop to the plain, to life in the ordinary. But, like them, we have glimpsed the transfigured and transfiguring glory of Christ and

the courts of Heaven. Everything we do together from that moment on will be inspired by that knowledge and that vision.

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