



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Annunciation of the Lord-March 25th 2019-Buckfast Abbey

Readings: Isaiah 7: 10-14, Psalm 39, Hebrews 10: 4-10,

Luke 1: 26-38

It is a joy and privilege for me to stand here today on this your special feast day. First of all because it is a celebration of the turning point of salvation history. Second because it brings me to the altar of sacrifice, the summit and source of our Faith, with my brother priest who, fifteen years ago, received me home into the Catholic Church. For both I give profound thanks. Enough personal stuff.

In the early 1970s the BBC put on a famous series, compered by Jacob Bronowski, entitled, 'The Ascent of Man'. It was hugely successful and entertaining but had, like most evolutionary doctrines, as its central conceit, that Mankind was, give or take the odd setback, irreversibly on the 'up'. This is a very popular post-Enlightenment heresy which, flying in the face of history, can lead to a false optimism followed by cynicism and despair. At one point in the narration, Bronowski stands ankle deep in the pond at Auschwitz which received the ashes of many of his family and rails against the quest for knowledge that allows men to behave like gods. His passing allusion to the Fall of Man will not be lost on the believer. But the believer does not start with Bronowski's optimism. The believer begins with the Scriptural revelation that Man is broken by sin.

The believer understands that, though he is made imago Dei, that image has been distorted, spoiled, obscured so that, in St. Paul's immortal phrase, 'we see through a glass darkly'. The believer knows that he has been warped by wilfulness and, as the unholy cannot dwell in the Presence of the All Holy, that he has been exiled from Eden – put out of Paradise. Only when Man has completed that devastating reality check can he, by the grace of God, begin to hope. Paradoxically it is the grim assessment of reality that leads to true Enlightenment and the prospect of joy. The evolutionist cannot explain Man's recidivism to evil. He cannot square his optimism with the death camps of Nazism, the ruthless starvation and slaughter of the hapless subjects of godless Marxism, the enthusiastic eugenicists who sacrifice the future in the clinics of the abortion industry and long to get their satanic hands on the old, the sick and the vulnerable.

As believers we always retain that hallmark of our humanity, shock at the capacity for human depravity – but we are not surprised. What has this catalogue of misery got to do with Our Lady on this glorious day? All the above is born of our disobedience to God. We have seized the fruit of the tree and sought to be gods. But on this day above all days, the fightback begins, the portal of salvation opens, the high road to the Eternal City beckons.

In our grace filled Lady we witness the overturning of the tragedy of Eden. We see the one who is truly to be 'the Mother of all who will live' become the New Eve and assent to her vocation. Mary's charism is her radical conformity to the will of God. That radical conformity to the will of God is the foundation of our faith. Do we wish to be the person we have made ourselves or the person God made us to be? This is, as they say, 'a no brainer'.

Because of Mary's unequivocal and unconditional 'YES' to God, the Eternal Word can become flesh. The Second Person of the Trinity can dwell in our humanity and take it through the gates of death and into the mystery and miracle of the Third Day, our mortality into His immortality, our time into eternity.

That is why we spend so much time with Mary. It is why we pray the Rosary. Not because it's a Catholic habit or we can't think what to say. We are, in the Rosarium, the rose garden of Our Lady, companions of the Grace-filled, choosing to align ourselves with her radical conformity to the will of God. We ponder on the mysteries of Christ with Mary because we want to share her heart of love for Jesus. Because we know, with her, that the true ascent of Man depends not on our fragile wisdom but on the assent of Man to the loving purposes of God.