

Homily, readings and prayers – Pat Forbes

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians (4:4-8)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Hear the word of the Lord, **thanks be to God**

A reading from the gospel according to Matthew (6:25-29)

²⁵ 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

Hear the word of the Lord, **thanks be to God**

The Recessional – The Nunc Dimittis

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace
according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and the the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end.

Amen.

Homily

Patricia Whitbread was born into this world towards the end of the Second World War. They were difficult, dark times and the British people would suffer the deprivations of war long after hostilities has ceased. Attempts to lift spirits included, of course culture; music, art, performance. The Festival of Britain in 1951 was described by the Prime Minister as *a tonic for the nation*. The site of the festival became 'The Southbank Centre' Europe's largest centre for the arts. One post war writer however challenged the composers of the day to become more involved in school music making, he called for the democratization of music and art. This was, he believed, one way to assist in the rebuilding of the nation and to set a path for the future. It was perhaps following a sentiment expressed by Confucius who said: *When music and courtesy are better understood and appreciated, there will be no war*. At this time the National Youth Orchestra was formed, school curriculums included music and at the forefront of this cultural renaissance was the composer Benjamin Britten. In the 1940s he wrote *The Ceremony of Carols* (1942), *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1946), *Saint Nicolas* (1948) and *Let's Make an Opera* (1949), Britten was praised for being "willing and able to adapt his technique to suit limited resources and ability" without having to "sacrifice his style."

This was the musical world of Pat's early years the world that Pat brought to this country. She was a great lover of Britten and so today we will hear the Nunc Dimittis recited as she leaves and also the hymn 'God moves in a mysterious way' both from the last movement of Britten's Cantata 'Saint Nicolas.' The Nunc Dimittis with its 'Lord now lettest though thy servant depart in peace' is a wonderful way to conclude. But what of the hymn?

The words were written by William Cowper a poet of the 18th century and a man troubled by periods of utter despondency and darkness, times when he felt life had no meaning. He wrote the poem in a moment of faith and hope and titled it 'Light shining out of darkness.' Cowper's thoughts are shared by many, perhaps most of us at different times, particularly times like these when we look into some very dread clouds. We do live in a world filled with worries in many different ways, but our gathering this morning, the music, our prayer and both our readings remind us of the presence of God. And from there we are called to turn our hearts to praise and thankfulness. We are called to dwell on that which is just and pure, pleasing, commendable and excellent and to things of beauty... above all we are not to worry.

As we have dwelt on Pat's life through the lens of our readings we have found great beauty, excellence and pleasure, attributes that she used to entertain but also to offer praise and thankfulness. They were attributes she freely shared with many of you. Like Britten, she helped us to lift our voices and our hearts, even those of us with limited resources and ability. In which, like Confucius, she showed understanding not just of music but also of courtesy!

Cowper was moved by the words of Jesus to Peter at the Last Supper: *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter*. Indeed we knowest not now, the ways of God are indeed mysterious to us and on occasions such as these, it seems almost trite to say don't worry. It sounds a little like that wartime slogan Keep Calm and Carry on! But whilst God's ways will always remain mysterious to us, there is no doubt that we can have sublime confidence in God's unerring wisdom, beauty and love and we can find our confidence lifted by our glimpses of these divine attributes in music and art and in the world and people around us. In Pat we glimpsed it and for that we give thanks.

We'll leave the last words to Britten's St Nicolas

Lord, I come to life, to final birth
I leave the misery of earth
for light, by Thy eternal grace
where I shall greet Thee face to face. Amen.