

On the Sunday closest to All Saints you may recall that I drew your attention to the East Window here in St Mary's, given in memory of the last Earl of Howth. This morning I want to begin by returning to that window, and in particular the figure of St Lawrence. For me there is a rather nice personal connection in that my home Parish Church in Northfield Birmingham is dedicated to St Lawrence.

Lawrence, a deacon in the Church in Rome, died during the persecution of the Emperor Valerian in 258. Tradition has it, when asked by the Prefect of Rome to produce the treasures of the Church, Lawrence appeared the following day with a group of children and the poor, saying, 'These are the treasures of the Church.' For his insolence, the Prefect ordered that he be roasted alive on a grid-iron. This is why in images and statues, Lawrence is always depicted, as he is on our window, holding a grid iron.

The story of Lawrence came to my mind as I read over the Gospel reading appointed for today, Matthew's account of the parable of the Talents. This is one of a series of Parables told by Jesus that we find in St Matthew's Gospel that speak of people in waiting, waiting for the bridegroom last week, waiting for the master to return this week. In the run up to Christmas, as we are about to enter upon the season of Advent, we are reminded that we stand in an in-between time, between the coming of Jesus as a child in Bethlehem and his coming at the end of time. So these parables of waiting are about the priorities of a community in waiting.

As I read our Parable, as I reflect on the story of Lawrence, the questions that come to my mind are, 'What are our treasures? What do we do with the treasures entrusted to us?'

This morning at 11:00 we are welcoming two young children into the family of the Church in Baptism. So the question of ‘What do we do with the treasures entrusted to us?’ has a particular relevance. To be entrusted with the parenting of a child is one of the greatest gifts, one of the greatest responsibilities, one of the greatest privileges we will receive; at the same time it is one of the greatest risks any of us will undertake.

The parents of these children undertake providing a context within which these children will grow from babies, to infants, to children, to teenagers, to young adults. To them will fall the responsibility of providing for their healthy physical development (the medical background of these parents will come in handy here). They will be entrusted with helping these children achieve their potential in education, in developing skills that will benefit them in work and leisure (sailing could well come into play here.). In the home these children will get their first experience, their first lessons in love, in commitment, in understanding, in service of others, what it means to forgive and to be forgiven. In bringing their children for Baptism they are recognising another dimension as they are asked:

By your own prayers and example, by your teaching and love, will you encourage *them* in the life and faith of the Christian community?

With the help of God, we will.

To enable them to become fully rounded individuals, we not only ensure their physical and educational development but also an understanding of what it is to be human, fully human, ones made in the image of God, made for fellowship with God. In the course of the service a number of Promises are made. As we were reflecting the other night these are promises not of people who have arrived but of people who are on a journey. You, your children are invited to join us all on a journey, a journey of discovery of what it means to be ones made in the image of God. What does it mean in daily living as I promise to

repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

what it means to

submit to Christ as Lord?

That is the journey of a lifetime.

We have thought of these children as treasures entrusted to their parents. I want to look beyond them and ask of ourselves, as members of the Body of Christ in this place: ‘What do we do with the treasures entrusted to us?’ Maybe we should first ask, ‘What do we see as our treasures?’ There is of course this building in which we worship, that we have inherited from previous generations, that we will entrust to future generations. But even as I say that I think of words of the late Bishop Noel Willoughby to the General Synod as he reminded his hearers, ‘The Church is what is left when the buildings have fallen down.’ Do we see each other, do we see ourselves, as the treasures of this Parish, ones made in God’s image, ones redeemed by Christ, members of the Body of Christ in this place. We have a ministry to each other of encouragement, of building each other up. Each one of us is a vital part of the Body of Christ in this place. Your presence at worship enhances our worship; your absence diminishes our worship. The encouraging word, the encouraging presence with someone in difficulty brings something of the love and presence of Christ into the life of another.

The Prefect of Rome demanded of Lawrence, bring me the treasures of the Church. We bring these children, we bring ourselves, we bring one another as:

we offer you our souls and bodies

to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit

to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.