

One of the features I have come to really appreciate about the way our readings from the Bible are ordered each Sunday is the facility it affords us for a sequential reading of various books of the Bible. So this year, during this Season of Trinity, in addition to our reading of Mark's Gospel, in our Old Testament reading we are following the story of David. We are also reading through a number of the Epistles; these letters to the early Churches that dealt with the various issues facing these evolving Christian communities as the Gospel moved out from its Jewish origins and out into the Graeco-Roman gentile world.

At the moment we are reading the second letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthian was in many ways a very vibrant Church, showing many signs of spiritual growth and vitality, highly prizing the various gifts of the Spirit. It was in other ways a troubled and divided Church; different factions showing allegiance to different leaders; divided also on socioeconomic lines so that even in the central act of the sharing of the bread and the wine some were being marginalised.

In the passage we have read today, Paul is dealing with the issue of the collection he is taking up among the Churches he is associated with for the relief of the Church in Jerusalem. He has pointed out the generous response of other Churches, far poorer than the Church in Corinth. We all know our own response when a collection is being taken up for something – say a presentation when someone is leaving work. What is expected? How much is everyone else giving – after all I don't want to look mean but I don't want to go over the top.. Paul is not so much looking at the amount of the gift as the attitude of mind behind the gift.

Back in the early 80's I was working in Finglas. Finglas Parish had been one of the first of the Parishes in the Church of Ireland to embrace the concept of Christian Stewardship. People were encouraged to review their commitment

on an annual basis with a Stewardship Renewal Service being held each year. So each year I used to write to each family in the Parish. As I wrote my first letter, I detailed the various commitments facing the Parish, the ongoing bills and asked people to reflect on this as they decided on their response. A few days later I was in the Mater Hospital visiting the man who had headed up the initial campaign some twenty years earlier. ‘I read your Stewardship letter.’ A pause. ‘I didn’t think much of it!’ Slightly taken aback, I asked him what was wrong with it. I have often reflected on that reply ever since. ‘Christian Stewardship,’ he said, ‘is not about paying bills it is about being thankful.’

It is about being thankful. That is at the heart of what Paul is talking about in the Epistle:

‘For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich’. *2 Cor 8.9*

My Christian life, my Christian witness is fundamentally about being thankful – an ongoing, daily, thankfulness for all that we have experienced of God’s self giving, redeeming love in Christ..

As I heard it said recently, ‘The attitude is gratitude’ An attitude of heart and mind that informs changed attitudes, changed priorities, changed hearts and minds. In the context of the Baptism that we are celebrating this morning, as welcome young Evan into the fellowship of the Church, I just want to reflect on this matter of attitudes, priorities, hearts and minds in our Christian pilgrimage.

In a few minutes I will be inviting Mick and Rhona to present their young child for Baptism. I will then ask two questions that address the whole issue of the context in which this young child will be brought up. In the first of these I will ask:

Parents and godparents, will you accept the responsibilities placed upon

you in bringing Evan for baptism and answer on his behalf. By your own prayers and example, by your teaching and love, will you encourage *him* in the life and faith of the Christian community?

**With the help of God, we will.**

By your own prayers and example, by your teaching and love, will you encourage him in the life and faith of the Christian community? Over the next few years Mick and Rhona will be teaching Evan a number of things; how to walk, how to talk, basic table manners. I would suspect that Mick will be imparting something of his love of Irish traditional music. The question to parents and god parents goes deeper than that. What does it mean to share in the life and faith of the Christian community? He will learn what it is to share in the worship of this place and in anticipation of this we as a congregation extend a welcome to him this morning as we say:

**We therefore receive and welcome you  
as a member with us of the body of Christ,  
as a child of the one heavenly Father,  
and as an inheritor of the kingdom of God**

We are also talking about the attitudes and values that Mick and Rhona will encourage in Evan. That he will be encouraged to see himself as a child of God, loved and valued by God. So that, in the fullness of time Evan will be one in whom, and through whom something of God's love, God's concern for those in need, God's concern for justice will be shown in the world.

So as this service draws to a conclusion I will give a lighted candle to Evan's parents and will say to him:

You have received the light of Christ;  
walk in this light all the days of your life.

**Shine as a light in the world  
to the glory of God the Father.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
**in the name of Christ. Amen.**