

Thought for the Day with Philip Rice

Now, as most of you know, I attend St Giles Church in Desborough, so you might be expecting me to talk about St Giles, but I know very little about him, except that he spent many years in the greatest solitude, deep in the forest, his sole companion being a deer, or hind, who in some stories sustained him on her milk. Giles otherwise ate a vegetarian diet. Some say he was the son of the king & queen of Athens. His forest retreat was finally discovered by the king's hunters, who had pursued the hind to its place of refuge. An arrow shot at the deer wounded the saint instead, who afterwards became a patron of cripples.

And that's all I know, so instead I'm going to talk about another Church in our Benefice, which is in Dingley and is called All Saints, because, of course, we are All Saints, if we follow the Way of Jesus. Something which is clear from Ephesians 2 (New Revised Standard Version):

¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

The second half of that passage talks about a temple, and the temple in OT times, and right up to the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Jesus, was the building in which God was believed to dwell. And Paul says that we are being built into a new temple, a new dwelling place for God. And this new dwelling place for God is built out of all the people of God over all generations.

So we sit alongside all the saints. We are all citizens together in the household of God – the dwelling place of God – built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Not just the Apostles. Not just the Prophets, but both the apostles and the prophets.

We are all saints together in the household of God.

Wow, you might think. I'm really a saint. But of course, being a saint brings with it responsibility. So what does it mean to be a saint? What does it mean to be part of the household of God?

Well, for a start, and in the light of what I've said so far, you don't have to be dead. I know that in some churches you have to have been dead for a period of years before you can be declared a saint, at least 5 years in the case of the Roman Catholics, though this was waived in the cases of Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II.

But we're thinking about saints as described in the NT: members of the household of God. And it behoves all of us to pause and think about how that makes us feel. How different does it make us feel? Because, surely we should feel different, if we're saints.

Well, the main thing we need to do is remain as part of God's household, so the foundations on which it is built should be our foundations – i.e. the Apostles and the Prophets – which means we should be acquainted with their teaching. We need to read them: St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke & St John. St Paul, St Peter, St James etc. as well as the Acts of the Apostles. And don't forget the prophets in the OT. The Bible informs and also sustains our Christian lives. We need to build our lives on those foundations of truth and wisdom.

Continuing the building analogy, there are the foundations and the bricks and the cement that either holds the bricks together or keeps them apart - whichever way you want to look at it. But, in this case, I'm going to say that it's the Holy Spirit that prevents the whole structure from collapsing.

As Christians, we need to remain a part of the household of God, built on the foundation of scripture, with Christ as the cornerstone, and allowing the Holy Spirit to hold us there. And in the end, we will all be part of that great multitude described in the book of Revelation, where St John the Evangelist wrote in chapter 7:

⁹After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice:

Salvation belongs to our God
Who sits upon the throne
And unto the Lamb

¹¹ All the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹² saying:

‘Amen!

Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honour
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!’

Let us God’s people, his saints, his household, worship him now and praise him, for all he has done and for who he is:

1 Salvation belongs to our God,
 who sits on the throne,
 and unto the Lamb

*Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks,
Honour and power and strength
Be to our God for ever and ever,
Be to our God for ever and ever,
Be to our God for ever and ever! Amen!*

2 And we the redeemed shall be strong,
 in purpose and unity
 declaring aloud

Praise and glory,

*Words and Music: Adrian Howard and Pat Turner
based on Revelation 7:9-12
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