

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH SERVING WATERLOO, BELGIUM

Chausée de Charleroi 2 1420 Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium +32 2 384 7780

Homily for Pledge Sunday

16 November, 2008

Deborah Whittingham, Pledge Campaign Chairperson

Today is Pledge Sunday and an important day in the calendar of All Saints' Church. On the 14th September I introduced you to the beginning of our Pledge Campaign when several members of our congregation joined with me to explain what belonging to our community means to us and how this belonging enables us to fulfil our mission and vision within the Anglican Episcopal tradition.

So what does making a Pledge actually mean? I can remember when I first started attending All Saints' receiving a Pledge Letter and wondering what I was actually being asked to do. I did not really understand the concept of a Pledge, primarily because it is not something that parishioners are asked to do in the United Kingdom, so the letter remained in my pending tray. Ignored until I was invited to join the Vestry, a year or so later, whereupon The Senior Warden, at that time, Peter Handford rather gleefully asked me to be The Financial Stewardship Chairman. The word 'Financial' had a nasty ring to it, indicating to me that I would have to deal with money. Not something I was too thrilled with: it became even worse when I asked Peter 'What did a Financial Stewardship Chairman actually do?', and he replied that I would be in charge of Pledging, i.e. asking the congregation to make a financial pledge each year. Now, I really did think that I had drawn the short straw because I had rather fancied being involved in Outreach, or Worship, or Catering, for example where I could make a real contribution, or so I thought. How presumptuous of me: this was obviously not what God was calling me to do. However undaunted, I set about ascertaining what I was supposed to do and I remembered the adage that Ghandi often told, 'Whatever you are asked to do, do it to the very best of your ability, even if you are called upon to clean the latrines'. Well perhaps, Financial Stewardship was better that. After several good lunches with Peter at Euro Control and much help and support from the Pledge Recorder, Susan Downhill, I began to understand and come to terms what Pledging actually meant.

We tend to think that Time, Talent and Treasure are in our own hands but in fact they are gifts from God. When we are given a gift we are expected to do something with it, and God expects us to do something with ours. We try to use our time and talent in our homes, in our work and in our community and fellowship with one

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH SERVING WATERLOO, BELGIUM

Chausée de Charleroi 2 1420 Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium +32 2 384 7780

another, effectively. For our treasure, we give a proportion of it to help and sustain our community here in All Saints' and various other charities of choice. As Luke reminds us, 'Where your treasure is there will be your heart also'. Thus a promise to give some of our treasure each Sunday, even if we do not attend worship, is our Pledge, our commitment that God asks of us.

Our Gospel reading today was taken from Matthew, quite pertinent to Pledge Sunday, I thought. Here, Jesus said, 'The kingdom of heaven will be as when a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them, to each of them he gave talents/money, according to their ability. The man went away on his journey. When he returned he found that each had invested their talents and increased the amount given to them, all except one who did not trust his master and was afraid, so he hid his money. The parable continues, 'for all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but for those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'

I can remember the Bishop of Durham, The Right Rev David Jenkins saying that the Parables are like poetry, they have two levels of meaning, a literal interpretation but when analysed there is a deeper significance which gives us a richer and more effective appreciation of what is actually being said. From a theological point of view this parable calls us to 'Be ready for Christ's coming' and involves more than playing it safe and doing little or nothing. It demands the kind of service that produces results. It challenges us to Get Up and Go, to love and serve the Lord not sit about waiting from him to come.

From a literal point of view we can draw a parallel with the financial situation of the present day. A somewhat simplistic interpretation but for the sake of this discussion it will suffice. Through fear, the banks will not lend money to each other, they, like the slave, do not trust their masters nor each other and so the populace cannot borrow to pay the mortgage or buy enough food to eat or survive unemployment. I read an article in The Daily Telegraph last week, which reported that 'Financial Recovery is hard for some and harder for others'. The reportage continued to say that 'we need to be increasingly decisive and act now to ensure survival.'

We most certainly do. We too need to be decisive and act now to ensure the continued survival of our community of All Saints. We need you to invest in us, we are safe and sure because we are in God's hands. I believe that He would never have led us so far in our Religious Quest without being confident that we will

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH SERVING WATERLOO, BELGIUM

Chausée de Charleroi 2 1420 Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium +32 2 384 7780

succeed, we will attain, providing that we act and do not bury our treasure in the ground because we are afraid or we do not believe in Him and His faithfulness. As President Elect Barack Obama said in his acceptance speech: 'Yes we can, Yes we can and Yes we can. Yes we can secure our future, if you help us to we can go forward.'

So now it is Autumn, the season of 'mists and mellow fruitfulness' and the Harvest is safely gathered in so that we can sustain ourselves throughout the forthcoming year. We are fortunate indeed. Now we would ask you to join us and bring the fruits of your labours to the Altar, to be blessed, the fruits that have grown from our travail which will help our community to grow and develop so that we can attain the vision and the mission of all Saints. We now ask you to place your Pledge Forms on the Plate so that they may be blessed by Father Mark. The Plate is offered at the same time as the Sacrament in which we all share. I ask you to join with us in the knowledge that every pledge of any size is a valued contribution to the whole.

I pledge, on behalf of the Vestry, to demonstrate good Stewardship of the many gifts from within the Parish, which you have committed to us. We value your support and will do everything within our power to ensure that we honour and respect your sincere and sacrificial pledge.

Please, feel that you can come and talk to me or any member of the Vestry if you have any worries or doubts. This church is for all of us and it is for all of us to share.

I leave you with this thought.

A note found on a Cathedral of Paris Pledge Card. It reads: 'Pledging is an act of joy. It allows me to express my thanks, not just for the Cathedral but for all of God's glory. No one else asks me to do that. Thank you.' AMEN

- Deborah Whittingham