

Stewardship Sunday 3/4 – Theme: Worship

Address by Fr Peter Delaney, at Evensong

To him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever!" Rev. 5. 13

Worship is a term used in sacred writings across the religions of the world to denote a proper reverence for the divine or the deity or God himself. In our two readings tonight we see the use of the definition as a part of the graphic words contained in his marvellous poem The Book of Revelation. Here St John on Patmos struggles to express what he feels about his vision of earth and heaven.

In the fifth chapter of the Book of Revelation John lays before us an insight into his vision of heaven built upon memories of worship as he has experienced them on earth. So there is a suggestion that some of these images may even reflect what actually went on in the great Temple in Jerusalem itself.

Thus thrones, seals scrolls, living beasts and incense and singing all are part of the worship of heaven itself. This is of course not far from synagogue worship with its opening of scrolls, chanting and public prayer still in use today.

And it is no surprise to find that Christian worship within historic buildings sometimes mirrors the liturgy of temple worship in Jerusalem at the time of the compiling of the Book of Revelation thought to be around 120 AD? John on Patmos is on fire with passion about the activity surrounding his idea of the worship of God. It is organised, ordered and full of a pattern of praise and adoration. Our passage ends with the hymn of praise "Worthy is the lamb to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and praise and glory for ever and ever".

That is one Biblical definition of the worship of Almighty God or God centred praise, but then there is another form of reverence shown to Jesus Christ during his lifetime a form of veneration shown towards those revered in respect and love for their service and ministry to those around them.; this is the kind of veneration shown to the prophets and leaders of Israel and the saints of God. It is often confused with worship reserved for God alone. That is where many people come unstuck with the universal churches devotion to the Mother of Christ and the saints of god. They are very different.

To ask Christ's Mother to intercede for us means that we sit beside the Virgin Mary and with her look towards her son and the Trinity of Father Son and Holy Spirit. Because of her holiness and the holiness of the saints and holy people of God the way of prayer is made easier by her aid and her example. But be clear worship in the Christian tradition is in its purest form reserved for the Godhead the source of all creation.

That is where our previous Stewardship Sundays are a part of today for our buildings built to provide the People of God with a place of worship and gathering and from which service emanates out into the community all become a part of the same message and take us to the second lesson tonight The Great Commission in Matthews Gospel.

And here the first disciples are with Jesus Christ as he bids them farewell and they finally see him as he really is the Father's Son the second person of the Holy Trinity and it is in this light that they worship him as God's Son. So something very special has happened this Jesus whom they knew as their friend on earth is now risen from the dead and as he returns to his father they see him as he really is God incarnate, the Word made flesh. Once they realise this, Jesus then gives them his authority to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the threefold name and teaching them to follow his words of life and finally the promise to be with us always to the very end of time.

Now the followers of Jesus have the full responsibility to live out the love of God as seen in Jesus Christ and to bring God's world back to him.

So we are asked to see worship as a part of life, with veneration enabling us to keep close to our Father in heaven and close to his saints and key figures of faith.

It is inevitable that there becomes no clear division for some people between worship and veneration as they try to love their God. And in a world where people worship everything from personalities to material objects of devotion, where cult figures have replaced our God and become things of veneration in themselves, it is even more important than ever to understand that Christian worship is reserved for Almighty God alone and all other forms of reverence, veneration and respect are a part of the fundamental act of love which we, the created give to our creator and Lord.

To God alone be all worship, adoration and praise now and for evermore.