

St Bartholomew

26 8 07

Almighty and everlasting God,
who gave your apostle Bartholomew grace
truly to believe and to preach your word
grant that your Church
may love that word which he believed
and may faithfully preach and receive the same.

Nathaniel replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel.'
(John 1 v49)

Sad-to-say, Bartholomew does not figure much in the Bible. His name appears only in the lists of the disciples found in Matthew, Mark and Luke and again in the Acts of the Apostles. John refers to him as Nathaniel. The name Bartholomew means son of Tolomey, i.e. it simply tells us who his father is; so it is perfectly possible and perfectly logical that Bartholomew's first name is Nathaniel which means 'gift of God' and certainly the apostle will prove to be a gift to those to whom he will bring the gospel.

Our most recent piece of stained glass, appropriately enough, is dedicated to St Bartholomew and is a graphic, if not disturbing, picture of our patron saint. I think the Pierponts who designed and executed and installed the window have done us a great service in producing a picture that shocks and challenge the comfortable belief that being a Christian is an easy option; for in truth, it costs to

witness to the truth of our faith, requiring some even to be martyrs and die for what we believe. And St Bartholomew's death is particularly gruesome. He was flayed alive according to 'The Roman Martyrology' before being beheaded, according to tradition, at Derbend on the Caspian Sea. Yet the sad, pink figure of our patron saint with his brown skin draped over his left arm affirms the fact that even death cannot suppress the truth.

Today, then, on our patronal festival when we celebrate the foundation of our church, I want to pose the question: 'whose church is this; whose church exactly is St Bartholomew's? And like all good Baptist sermons, there are three points I want to make.

First and foremost, this is God's church. For St Bartholomew's, Dinard, to have survived in the past and to survive into the future, it must be part of the wider Church of God. At my ordination to the priesthood in the summer of 1994, I was ordained priest in the Church of God. The Church of God belongs to God and is a means by which people can connect with and worship him. If you have the chance to read through our Visitors' Book, one of the themes that run through the comments is how much at peace people feel who visit this place; how prayerful the atmosphere here to be; how warm the welcome they receive. If God is at the heart of our worship and we leave fired by enthusiasm, then this place is truly connecting us with God.

Secondly, it is our church. The church is a building but the church is also a collection or gathering of people. St Bartholomew's is our church because we

come here to worship God, to strengthen our faith, and to enjoy fellowship. It is our church because we have in common our love of God and our love of our neighbour. It is ours because through our time and effort, through our prayer and our money, we sustain a Christian presence in this place which we can hand on to the next generation.

Thirdly, it is my church. Of course, it is mine in the sense that I am your priest but what I mean by my church is that it is the church of each individual present. Yes it is ours collectively but it is also mine individually; by my church, I mean each one of us as an independent individual owns the church. As individuals, we can derive enormous benefits from being in this place and belonging to this community of believers but individually we each have a responsibility to preserve this church by our faithful stewardship of the legacy entrusted to our care.

So St Bartholomew's is dedicated to an apostle who gave his life that the faith embodied in our church might be passed on to generations then unborn. And if St Bartholomew's is truly to be a church of God and it is both our church and my church, then we too should be prepared to be faithful stewards of His church.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist
St Bartholomew's Dinard
26th August, 2007*

A: Sermon 16:Bartholomew

