

Everlasting

15 11 09

Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son was revealed to destroy the works of the devil
and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life:
grant that we, having this hope,
may purify ourselves even as he is pure;
that when he shall appear in power and great glory
we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;
where he is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
one God now and for ever.

My text may be found in the opening verse of today's psalm:

'Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you' (16 v1)

In my study bedroom in the chaplaincy flat, I have a picture from the Church Times of Pope Benedict XVI standing praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, all that is left of the third Temple built by Herod the Great. Work began in 19BC and was largely complete within ten years though it was not finally finished until 64AD. In today's gospel passage we can appreciate the awe and wonder of one unnamed disciple who shares his excitement with Jesus at just how magnificent a building the Temple seems to him. His words have a delightful, childlike wonder about them as he simply shares his amazement with Jesus; 'Look, Teacher, what

large stones and what large buildings.’ With television and foreign travel, we tend to be more sophisticated but to a villager from Galilee in the 1st century AD, the Temple at Jerusalem must have been the epitome of the splendour of God made manifest in stone. Sadly, his bubble of delight is punctured by Jesus’ prophesy: ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’ Cold words indeed predicting the Temple’s final destruction! In fact, the Temple was despoiled and destroyed in AD 70 when a Roman army brutally crushed the Jewish revolt.

We live in a life subject to change. Nothing lasts forever. We have the message programmed in our own bodies for however healthy the lives we lead may be, one day we will surely all die. In the face of impermanence, in the light of the fact that we will die and cease to be, the psalmist cries out to God for protection

Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you

I have said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord, my good above all other

The Psalmist puts his trust in God to protect him because he believes in a loving God who is good and who will not abandon him to the grave. Belief in a life after death is a later development in Judaism. The Sadducees, the priestly party, did not believe in an afterlife but interestingly the Pharisees did – this much they shared with Christians. In our passage from Daniel 12 we have in verse 2 an early expression of a belief in the resurrection from the dead: ‘Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.’

What Christianity offers is a sense of permanence in the face of impermanence. In a transitory world, Christianity is offering something which really lasts. Christianity is a sure foundation, a rock on which to build our lives. What Christianity reveals is a God who loves us as individuals and makes himself known to us. Christianity provides a moral framework by which to live our lives. Christianity teaches us that we are all made in the image of God, that embodied, each of us has worth and dignity. Christianity promises us the life of the world to come.

The psalmist asks for protection. The disciple is told that even the Temple will not last forever. Our protection, however, is a belief in a God whose everlasting arms support us for he loves us and he will not abandon us either in this life or at our death.

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

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H: Sermon 21: Everlasting

