

St Bartholomew

27 8 06

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.

‘You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’. Luke 22 v30

Today, we celebrate our patronal festival, the feast of St Bartholomew. Strictly speaking, St Bartholomew’s Day is 24th August but as today is the nearest Sunday to the day itself, it is right and proper to transfer the feast. I’ve been undertaking chaplaincies here since 1995 and 11 years on, on my last Sunday with you before I take up the permanent appointment here next January, it is both good and appropriate to preach on the man to whom our church is dedicated.

If we confine ourselves to biblical sources, then not much is known specifically about Bartholomew except his name. Bartholomaios in Greek, at

the time, the word meant son of Ptolemy. His name appears in the four lists of the Twelve in Matthew (10v3), Mark (3v8), Luke (6v14) and Acts (1v13). His association with Philip in the first three lists has lead many scholars to associate Bartholomew with Philip's friend, Nathanael whose call to be a disciple is recorded in the opening chapter of John's gospel. Bartholomew is a patronymic, that is to say it indicates who his father is, so it is perfectly possible and logical that Bartholomew should have two names. But as the great New Testament scholar, F F Bruce, succinctly writes, 'on this, certainly is unattainable'. If Bartholomew is one and the same as Nathanael, then his name Nathanael itself means 'gift of God' and certainly the apostle will later prove to be a gift to those to whom he will bring the gospel if legend and tradition are to be believed.

So if Bartholomew and Nathanael are one and the same then we have a couple more biblical angles on the person. When his friend Philip enthusiastically shares his excitement at having met the Messiah, he cynically quips 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Yet as soon as he meets Jesus, he is impressed. 'Behold an Israelite in whom is no guile.' How does Jesus know him he asks to which Jesus replies that before Philip came to him, Nathanael Bartholomew was sitting under a fig tree. The simple vision is sufficient for him to declare in a leap of faith that Jesus is both the Son of God and King of Israel, in other words the Messiah. It is something authentic about Jesus' words and presence which he recognises and to which he responds. One day, his confidence and belief in Jesus will eventually lead to his own martyrdom. His second appearance by name in John's gospel is in

chapter 21 as one of seven disciples to witness a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias.

Unfortunately, nothing is known for certain either where Bartholomew took the good news of the gospel or where and how he met his death. Eusebius records that during the second half of 2nd century, Pantenus of Alexander found a gospel of St Matthew left behind by Bartholomew in India. The Roman Martyrology attributes his apostolate to both India and Armenia where he was said to have been flayed alive before being beheaded, the place according to tradition being Derbend on the Caspian Sea. His remains have found their resting place in Rome in the church of St Bartholomew on the Tiber while in the 11th century, an arm was given to Canterbury by the wife of King Canute.

In our own church, we are fortunate to have been given a stained-glass window designed and executed by the Pierpont family, American citizens who have a long association with St Bartholomew's. The window vividly captures key moments in the death and life of our patron saint and makes a reference to the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre on 24th August 1572 which starting in Paris heralded the slaughter of 1,000s of Huguenots, French Protestants, throughout France. In sharp contrast to the bloody conflicts which followed the Reformation, three hundred years later, our church was founded in this place. St Bartholomew's Dinard is a tribute to the growing religious toleration in post revolutionary France and a sign of Christian ecumenism lovingly fostered by Elizabeth Hannay who did so much to

preserve this church after the Second World War for the present generation of worshippers.

So may we give thanks for St Bartholomew who was a witness to the truth of the gospel, a man who as my opening text promises will dine with Christ in heaven and judge one of the twelve tribes of Israel. May we not only respect the truth of the gospel he faithfully proclaimed but help build bridges between Christians of all persuasion.

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

Preached at Holy Communion

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

27th August, 2006

A: Sermon 15: St Bartholomew

