

Come again

27 11 11

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ
 came to us in great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come in his glorious majesty
 to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal.

My text today is from the Mark's gospel chapter 13 and verse 26, **'Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.'**

One of the nice things about being a teacher at Dame Alice Owen's School was at the start of the academic year in September, we were each given a brand new diary for the Academic Year. Now as a priest when I'm back in Potters Bar in October, I make sure to buy myself a brand new priest's diary for the new Church Year which incidentally begins today on Advent Sunday.

If you look at our stained glass, the windows in brief give us nearly a complete picture of the life of Christ. In the transept, there is a large C20 French Nativity window with Mary holding a very large baby Jesus up for the Wise Man to adore.

The window to my left of the main aisle, a gift from the British and American children attending the Sunday school in 1897, depicts the boy Jesus aged 12 in the Temple at Jerusalem. Behind the font are two pre-Raphaelite windows of Jesus the man at the height of his ministry: one pictures Jesus as 'the Good Shepherd;' the other as 'the Light of the World'. The two windows at the back of the side aisle, through which in good weather the evening sunlight streams, depicts the Resurrection and the Ascension. Above the altar, however, are arguably our finest windows depicting the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection. It's all there "except for one thing – the Second Coming.

I'm not sure why not. Perhaps it was not fashionable nor palatable to depict the Second Coming and the Last Judgement that it presages. There are some great if somewhat disturbing mediaeval Doom wall paintings depicting the judgement of God complete with some disturbing little devils and there is, of course, the wonderfully magnificent picture by Michelangelo of the Last Judgement in the Sistine chapel a postcard of which my friend, Father Richard sent me from Rome while on holiday there this September. If you look carefully, you can see St Bartholomew sitting a little lower on the right hand side of Christ enthroned as judge. Bartholomew, skin renewed, is holding in his left hand his old skin and in his right a single skinner's knife.

I guess the absence of a window here on the Second Coming neatly illustrates our general reluctance to confront the end of times. But one thing is certain the end will come for all of us, whether that be individually or collectively because we are all mortal and we know life is finite and all things ultimately have a sell-by date.

Equally certain is the fact that no one knows when the end will be. It could be any time and Jesus pictures it coming like a thief in the night. So if and when someone tries to scare you with the message that the end is nigh, you are perfectly at liberty to agree with him while at the same time disagreeing with her that anyone can know precisely when this time will be. Yes, there are wars and rumours of wars. Yes, there are earthquakes and volcanoes do erupt. Yes, there are tidal waves and the world of finance is about to collapse so things can and do look bad. But as for the end, when the end will be, no one except God knows.

But it is good to live with the knowledge that nothings is forever. In a Jewish home, traditionally a corner of one room is left undecorated to symbolise the impermanence of things material. The thought that things will end can make us appreciate what we have for the moment and to value what we may too easily take for granted. It is good, too, to live with the knowledge that what we do is judged and evaluated. It is a great motivator to know that we should not be careless with our opportunities to be good stewards of our time, money and effort.

But though we have a responsibility to do the best we can, ultimately our redemption and salvation comes not because we tried but because we believed. Our faith is in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We are saved because we believe and because we believe we will want to do our best for him in the limited time we all necessarily have available.

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

Preached at the Parish Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

27th November, 2011

H: Sermon 25: Come again

