

All Saints Day sermon: The “Te Deum” window at Holy Trinity Church, Hereford



A little bit of history ...

- The present west window at Holy Trinity began life as the east window of St Matthew's Sydenham, a daughter church built in the 1880s for that growing and quite smart part of South London (near Crystal Palace). It was made by Heaton, Butler & Bayne and fitted in 1900.
- Within 20 years though the smart people had moved on and the area was in decline, and in 1938 the church closed and the fittings were removed. A flying bomb is said to have finished it off in 1945: another certainly hit Sydenham vicarage though the family were happily unharmed.
- The window was fitted at Holy Trinity after the war by William Morris & Co in 1946.

A changing world

- Christ in Majesty is in the centre (echoing our own east window)
- It speaks of an ordered world - but an already changing one
 - Imperial
 - Christian/C of E
 - White/male/British ...
- Contrast
 - Black History Month/BLM
 - Awkward archbishops
- The angels represent worship in heaven, looking intently towards the Majesty of Christ's glory
- They hold words from the Te Deum: *Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory*
- Then said or sung in every church every Sunday then in this BCP form
- And now? Who knows what *Sabaoth* means?
- Beneath the angels is another line from the Te Deum: *Holy holy holy, Lord God of Sabaoth [Hosts]*
- The end of an age of renewed holiness (both catholic & evangelical) and public rectitude
- Soon the holy will be removed to the safety and silence of the sanctuary; awkward; not for public consumption [Cliff's Millennium Prayer was banned by radio stations]

Saints below: those who witness to God

Saints of the Church: The Holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee
St Augustine, Venerable Bede, St Ambrose, St Elizabeth, St Agnes, St Lucia

Scripture writers: We praise thee O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord
An Evangelist (The Gospels), St Paul (The Epistles), St John the Divine (?) (Revelation), A prophet (The Prophets), Moses (The Law & History Books), King David (The Psalms)

Martyrs (who witness): The noble army of martyrs praise thee
St Alban (here, a cross), St George (armour), St Stephen (stones), St Agatha (here, a whip), St Cecilia (organ), St Catherine (wheel)

This too was a changing world

- The question now was not how did people of long ago have faith and witness to God
- But how could we, especially in the aftermath of world war
- We needed to put ourselves into the windows; could we also put God there still?
- Bible verses in WW1 window; just the planes in a WW2 one...

So what is a saint for us?

- Still someone who points to God
- But especially by letting his light shine through them
- We are suspicious of proclamation and cult of personality (even if, and perhaps because, our world is full of those)
- We seek authenticity and see it in suffering not triumph, in confusion not certainty
- We can take our cue from the readings for today, All Saints Day
- Blessed, rather, are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who thirst for righteousness, are merciful, are pure in heart, are peacemakers, and are persecuted for righteousness' sake
- Those before the throne of God have known hunger and thirst; their tears are wiped away; they are led to the springs of the water of life
- Saints for us are likely to be ordinary people who, when faced with extraordinary & difficult times, still let the light of Christ shine through
- That is why the statues of modern martyrs on the west front of Westminster Abbey work for me and for many
- They may be barely known to us, but they kept shining to the end:
- Maximilian Kolbe, Manche Masemola, Janani Luwum, Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia, Martin Luther King, Óscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Esther John, Lucian Tapiedi, and Wang Zhiming.

And what about us?

- And if a saint is an ordinary person to whom a not-so-ordinary thing happens and still the light of Christ shines through them
- Then we can indeed all pray that we will prove to be "saints" in our own times of trial
- And the end of the Te Deum rather than its beginning will be our song:
 - Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
 - Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in thee.
 - Lord, in thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.

David Thomson