

**St Lazarus Investiture  
April 18<sup>th</sup> 2015**

**Carlisle Cathedral**

We gather for this investiture on a glorious morning two weeks into Eastertide. So we have, I hope, a skip in our step and a song on our lips in this season which is the high point of the Christian year. For Christ our Lord is risen – and our joy knows no end.

And the simple point I want to make today is that at the heart of our joyful response to all that God has done for us in Christ – crucified and risen – is thanksgiving. Thanksgiving which, I hope to show, is a particular and defining characteristic of the path that Christians follow through life. God's love in Christ has set us free and made us new; no wonder we give thanks.

I know from reading both the Vigil service that you had last night at Lanercost and the order for this investiture today that the emblem of the Holy Cross matters to the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem. It is both your badge and inspiration – and we will hear this spelt out as the service proceeds.

Seeing it set out so eloquently reminded me of a wise priest I know who, when he talked about the Christian life and people's pilgrimage through life, would sometimes point to a cross which hung above the fireplace in his room and ask: "What are your feelings when you look at Jesus in the cross?". Some would admit that they were angry when they thought how Jesus had been so treated. How could he, how could anyone be condemned to such an excruciating death? Others would talk of the sorrow they felt – it was such a cruel fate for someone who had lived his life for others, they said.

We can understand those reactions but the priest suggested another response. When I look at the Cross, he would say, I find I am overwhelmed by thankfulness. Thankfulness because I see there Jesus saying "Yes" to God in love and trust; thankfulness that God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Thankfulness that Jesus was obedient to the Father's loving purpose even unto death – death on a cross. People would leave those conversations with new insight and understanding.

So I suggest this theme of thanksgiving is at the heart of our Easter joy; it is not hard to find this theme in scripture and the two readings we have heard today proclaim it loud and clear. In the first reading (Colossians 3. 12-17) Paul presents an uncomplicated list of virtues which flow from our being "risen" with Christ – and crowns the passage with the great verse: Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all

in the name of the Lord Jesus – giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In the reading from St Luke (17. 11-19) we had the same theme in narrative form. God is the giver of all good. And in this particular story, the outcasts of society are counted in – there is to be no estrangement; all are to be caught up in the love and life of God. How can we fail to respond – with thankful hearts.

And yet, then as now, if we look around us, we see that giving thanks is not the universal watchword of the day. 9 out of 10 in the Gospel story fail to respond. And in our own day, for every person we might call Mr or Mrs Thankful, we can find others whom we might call Mr and Mrs Litigious and Mr and Mrs Burdened. Perhaps you know them – they are more inclined to bemoan their lot or to say how things have changed for the worse.

Mr and Mrs Litigious keep popping up in our newspapers. They are always keen to stand up for their rights, the rights they think are being undermined most wilfully by neighbours and fellow citizens. In fact they are rather encouraged in their approach to things by the way that insurance companies advertise and ask them whether they have had an accident which might entitle them to compensation. Why not put in a claim?

Only recently Mrs Litigious was visiting a stately home (or was it a Cathedral) when she missed a step and fell and hurt her back. The staff were quick to help and made sure she had time to compose herself. But now she's wondering whether a better sign should have been put up to warn her. Should she put in a claim?

Or perhaps you know Mr and Mrs Burdened. The tragedies and trials of human life weigh heavily on this couple. Life seems full of perplexing issues which leave them not knowing which way to turn. Sometimes Mr and Mrs Burdened carry this load with a certain resignation – like the Stoics of old. It's just the way life is.

But more often they hang on to what we might call the clutter of life's confusions and sometimes seem determined to do so. They carry the tiffs and arguments of the past which might have been resolved if only they had been a bit more open to the possibilities of what might be.

And they are quick to add the burdens other people carry to their own problems. In fact the daily news broadcasts are a nightmare for them – and this week's tragedies of migrants crossing dangerous seas to escape the cruelties and oppression of their home country; of people being persecuted for their faith; of tragic loss of life nearer home – all this has had them hiding behind the sofa.

Of course I am painting caricatures. But whilst we can smile at the pictures I paint, we can also learn some lessons here. Both these couples, it seems to me, have got hold of an important idea. But by taking it to an extreme, they distort it.

Mr and Mrs Litigious have recognised that there is a nobility about human being which should never be lost. That nobility is God-given and must be protected. We are made – all of us - in God's image and likeness. So human beings must not be exploited or taken for granted; their value and potential must not pass for nothing. And if sometimes that means that we must take a stand on an issue of human rights – so be it. As we will hear later: you are called to have ardent zeal for Justice.

And Mr and Mrs Burdened, surely, have taken to heart the great New Testament command that we should bear each other's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. Again, as we will hear, you are to exercise Christian sympathy and compassion. In trying to do that we never forget both the wonderful invitation Jesus makes that we should come to him if we find that we are heavy laden, and his promise that he will refresh us when we do so. That opens up to us the path to new endeavours and new possibilities – and new thanksgivings.

Which brings me back to thankfulness as the distinguishing mark of the Christian response to God, to God's world, and to all that life involves. One writer suggested that there are at least twenty occasions everyday when he wanted to say thank you to God – simply, naturally and faithfully. Grace before meals, thanks for a beautiful morning, a friendly meeting, love given and received, a problem solved. Thanks for books and music and whatever it is which enriches our lives. You will be able to add to that list – not least from your lives as members of this noble order.

Thankfulness worthy of the name goes deep. It is no casual politeness. It connects with the heart and does not ignore the times when things are hard for us or for other people. It takes seriously, I have suggested, when God's purposes of love are frustrated and denied in the life of the world. George Herbert put it beautifully when he said

Thou who hast given so much to me, give one thing more,  
A grateful heart.

That goes to the heart of the matter and shapes time and again our response to the overflowing generosity of God – to whom be all praise and honour, glory and thanks, now and for ever. Amen.

**The Very Revd Mark Boyling  
Dean of Carlisle**