

Homily Trinity 7 – Baptism

Colossians 3.1-11, Luke 12.13-21

Canon Alison Tyler

Those of us who are parents always want the best for our children, so we share with them all the good things, the best, that we have found in our own lives, and then we hope and pray that we have done enough. Enough, to give them the gifts and tools they need to live their own lives happily and successfully, so Christian parents very often bring our children for baptism, to give the Holy Spirit every possible opportunity to be active in their lives.

My own father said to me that only when we come towards the end of our lives, will we know what was important to us, because it will have been what shaped our lives, and it will be where we have directed the most energy and effort.

So today as we welcome Sophie to her baptism and to fellowship in the Church and we hope very much it will shape her life in lots of positive and important ways. Not least we hope that she will come to know and love God who made us all, and to share in the risen life of Christ.

Our readings today offer us two different pictures of how we might live.

In Luke we have the story of the rich man. Jesus told the story in response to someone asking him to intervene in a dispute between brothers about inheritance – he refused. Instead, he warns the man who asked, against greed and the desire for possessions – perhaps he sensed that desire for more of the inheritance, was at the root of the request for his help. Life, he says, life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. And then he tells the story of the rich man.

Two things stand out immediately, first, he was already rich, and suddenly he became very much richer, and second, he thought only about himself - he had no thoughts of gratitude, or of giving some away and sharing, or of celebrating with friends and having a generous party. Only of storing up stuff for his future.

He was a foolish man for a number of reasons first, because he had clearly not thought of his own death, or of what might happen to his possessions. There is no mention of descendants or of friends

Secondly, he is foolish because he made assumptions about the future - he does not know he is due to die that very night, with no time to prepare himself, to repent of any wrongdoing or to give away some of his possessions, he would leave nothing behind him but stuff. He had no future. He was not a person who lived each day in the knowledge that it might be his last nor had he made any preparations it seems for an encounter with God. No amount of wealth could guarantee him longer life or the leisure to enjoy his wealth.

He was, it appears, one of those people who always want more, and so never see or understand, that more things or more stuff, will not satisfy him, they will only feed his desire for yet more. A bigger house, a better car, bigger barns but no time to enjoy them because the next thing is already calling....

St Augustine got it right, in the fourth century when he wrote: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." This is real wisdom that we can share with Sophie, as she grows and matures.

Anything – even bad things – can bring us fleeting pleasure but they will not bring lasting satisfaction. Possessions, money or bigger barns will not fill the empty soul or calm the restless heart. Ultimately, as we follow

Christ, we come to know that only God through Christ can fill those spaces and bring peace and calm into our lives.

Things can never bring meaning and purpose to our lives; we learn from our experience on the journey of faith and trust, seeking to live lives of mutual love and service, that only the living God can do that.

So thirdly, the rich man was foolish because he invested and planned to invest yet more, but only materially in more stuff and not spiritually. He had devoted himself to work and to building prosperity, and there is no indication that he ever thought that this might not be all that there is, It seems he had not heard even the rumour of God and of God's love for him. He is in fact just the kind of person who needs to hear the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God.

We can do this for all those who come to baptism, we can share with them our faith and our hope, and we can keep alive the rumour of God's love for us and for them.

Contrast the rich man's life, its inner poverty and bleakness, and its sudden dramatic end, with the writer to the Colossians' vision of the resurrection life which is ours through baptism. Since you have been raised with Christ he says, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, ascended with Christ.... He shows us the vision of renewal that we will share, as he says 'When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory'

Because of that glory, the glory of lives lived following in the footsteps of Jesus still to come, he warns us against a whole list of sins mostly sexual, but ending with the words "and greed (which is idolatry)" which links us straight back to the story of the rich fool, and to Jesus's warning against greed and the desire for possessions, but it also takes us

straight to the modern evils of excess and over consumption, both inevitably leading to inner poverty, injustice and separation from God and each other.

The writer moves on from sexual appetites and greed and calls us to get rid of “anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language” which might, these days sound just like every day political language. The problem is, we so often give ourselves free reign to use so much dismissive and slanderous language in our everyday lives that it has a negative impact on trust, affection and confidence in all our relationships – large scale and small.

All these things are part of the old life, which we leave behind in our baptism, as we are clothed with the new life of Christ, the compassionate life of love and service, and the language of violence and deceit, the idolatry of greed and insatiable sexual appetite have no part in in our renewal and restoration as those made in the image of God.

In such truthful and grace filled living “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free: but Christ is all and in all” there is no room for such labels, all ethnic, religious, cultural, power based and economic divisions, all such barriers collapse in the face of compassionate Christ centred lives of love and service! They are no longer needed or relevant and we are privileged to offer this vision, of mutual love and service for the common good, as a sign of God’s glory, to Sophie, as she begins her membership of Christ’s body, the Church.

Amen