

## ST MARK'S FOUNDERS' DAY SERMON 2018

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. Amen.

In my bedside drawer, there's a book entitled: *Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart*. As you might suspect, it's full of really cheerful stuff, like Chapter 12: *The problems of the elderly are frequently serious ... but seldom interesting*. Not very inspiring! But as the years tick by, it does help me appreciate curious little stories like this one, from a nurse at the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Cosham, England. And I'll tell it in her own words.

"George is a regular patient in his late 80s. One morning he arrived to have some stitches removed. I weighed him, took his blood pressure, and told him to take a seat, knowing it would be quite a while before a doctor could see him. When I noticed him looking at his watch, I asked if he was in a hurry. He said, no, not really, just that he had to go to the nursing home down the road to have breakfast with his wife.

I inquired about her health. George said that unfortunately she suffered from Alzheimer's. I then asked if she'd be upset if he was a bit late. He doubted it as she no longer knew who he was, in fact, she hadn't even recognised him for the last five years. I was surprised and said: "And you still go every morning?" He smiled and patted my hand: "She mightn't know me, but I still know who she is."

I can only describe George's devotion as a sacrifice of love. And for me, as the years tick by here at St Mark's, it highlights the fact that it's taken countless, individual sacrifices of love [*big sacrifices of time, money and talent*], all part of an on-going team effort, to establish, build, and now sustain this College. Whether it's love for the institution itself, or for the people who comprise, or will comprise it, or love of God, or a broader love of learning and a desire to help others engage in it ... it matters not.

What does matter is that those sacrifices have been made; and we're here today to pay tribute to those who've made them. And so we honour our patron saint, Saint Mark, who surrendered his life for the sake of the Gospel; our founders, visionary men like Sir Archibald Grenfell Price and the Reverend Julian Bickersteth; our benefactors, past and present, without whose generosity the vision would've been stillborn, or unable to prosper; and the 20 Marksmen who sacrificed their lives in the cause of the freedom which makes it possible for us to enjoy the privileges conferred by this College.

Today I want to add to that category. I want to add our St Mark's equivalents of George. Very few people would have known of George's habitual thoughtfulness. Maybe some nursing home staff. A few relatives. And there are certainly no monuments to him. And surely similar applies here.

Each year, before Founders' Day, I browse Sir Archie's book, *A History of St Mark's College*. And what caught my eye on this occasion, was a line on page 99: "But what of those who have left no memorial?" The specific reference in this instance was to old Collegians, but the

remark can be equally well applied to the lesser movers and shakers who've helped make the College what it is today. So, what of them?

The answer, I think, is in the reading the Master brought to us. After rightly praising famous ancestors, including political and military leaders, as well as academics and wealthy benefactors, the ancient writer says this: "But of others there is no memory, they have perished as though they had never existed ... but these were also godly people, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten."

The exegete in me says two words there are either implied, or lost in translation ... "by God." They have not been forgotten ... by God. The God who knows every quark and lepton in creation, knows exactly who these people are, precisely what they've done.

For us though, it's simply humanly impossible for us to remember, or even know, everyone who's ever contributed to our cause. But one of the wonderful things about the sacred scriptures is that they tell us, that among other things beyond the horizon of this life, credit will be given, justice will be done.

I began with a contemporary story – I'll finish with a legendary one – from medieval Europe. There was a wealthy prince who hired architects and builders to construct a church on the hill above the local village. [*This, entirely at his own expense.*] Eventually, hubris got the better of him. When the imposing structure was completed, in spite of the team nature of the project, the prince wanted to take sole credit. He decided, therefore, to add a statue of himself and have a special niche carved out for his name.

However, on the day of dedication, the prince's name was found to have mysteriously disappeared. Instead, in its place, was that of a poor widow [*written, according to the villagers, by an angel's hand*]. The prince was astonished. He summoned the widow to his castle and asked what on earth she'd done to contribute to the building of his glorious church. She was alarmed and confessed that because they'd been working in such a noble cause, she'd given a few handfuls of hay to the cart horses as they'd hauled the heavy stones up the hill.

Was it God's way of affirming that even the smallest contribution will not be overlooked in the Kingdom of Heaven? I don't know! But I do know this! In my bedside drawer, there's another, much more ancient book, and in it, some of the most encouraging words Jesus ever spoke: "If you give even a cup of cold water," he said, "to one of the least of these my followers, you will surely be rewarded."

Amen.