

The Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Bruton Parish Church
The Rev'd Chris Epperson
Sunday, January 1, 2012

We just commemorated the lesser festival of Thomas Becket. Becket is my favorite St. Thomas. He was friend and courtier of Henry 2, Chancellor of England and ultimately, Archbishop of Canterbury. Thomas was made Archbishop because Henry believed if he put his pal in the highest ecclesiastical post in England, the Church might be more kindly disposed toward him.

It didn't quite work out that way. Far from being a sycophant, Becket became a zealous defender of the Church against the crown. It is not clear if this was a real religious sentiment on Thomas Becket's behalf, or the fact he was a difficult man. I prefer a real religious sentiment, that came to him late in life, in the right time, in God's time.

In the end Becket was killed by a group of knights dedicated to Henry's service. Henry uttered aloud a desire to be "rid of this meddlesome priest." The knights took this as a command from Henry, but Henry denied it was an order. Becket was martyred in Canterbury Cathedral on December 29, 1170. Thomas Becket became a very popular saint in the English Church. He became a symbol of conversion and fortitude, rejecting the powers of this world in the name of faithfulness.

I love Becket. I am guilty of being a romantic. For me, it is all too easy to ascribe esteem to these pivotal eras in the life of the faith and the Church. Nothing wrong with romance, it can be the source of inspiration, but we are called to live and be faithful in our own time.

The feast of the Holy Name takes us back to the very beginning. We linger at the manger, watching shepherds witnessing the arrival of the shepherds, who heard the message from the angels. Mary and Joseph are there, and so is the child, Jesus.

This story of course is told in light of the resurrection. The stories of Jesus' birth, and what little there is of his early life don't come until Jesus' intimates reflect on the person they knew as the Risen Lord. They are driven back to the beginning by their experience of Jesus in their present.

So we remember shepherds, who come and go to tell what they have seen. But, what happens to them? I guess they go back to their fields.

What happens to those they told? What did they do with the news of the Savior's birth? We don't know.

Joseph is there. He will be around for a little while longer in the telling of the story, but he will soon be gone.

Then, there is Mary. She is there in the beginning. She is there in the midst of it all. She will be there every step of the way, even at the foot of the cross and into the Early Church. Mary is the only one that is present from beginning to end.

All the rest of Jesus' followers come, when they come. They enter at the right time. They enter in God's time.

It doesn't matter when you arrive. It doesn't matter how you get here. What matters is that you take these things and ponder them in your heart and come.

Interesting point: Saints' days are assigned, not on the day of some day of some grand achievement, but on the day of the saint's death. God's time is not bound by ours ...