

From the Rector

For my post Easter break I went to Vienna. For those who don't know it Vienna is a fascinating city, the former capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, well known to Mozart and the home of the Waltz. It is also closely associated the Hapsburgs, the Imperial dynasty which at its height ruled the majority of Europe and vast swathes of the Americas. This was achieved primarily through marriage alliances which allowed the Hapsburgs to accumulate many kingdoms and principalities along with the treasure that went with them. When thinking of the Hapsburg treasure we must recapture our school-child image of that word with rooms full of golden crowns and goblets, precious stones the size of eggs, bejewelled swords, necklaces and finely embroidered robes weighed-down with gem-stones. This is the loot of the ages in which one can read over a thousand years of European history.

The core of the treasure belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. This was a religious and political federation based on the conquests of Charlemagne (742-814), the first ruler after the fall of the western Rome Empire to bring stability large parts of Europe. The Holy Roman Emperor had a crown, one of the oldest in Europe. It purports to be the crown of Charlemagne but more likely dates from 926. Unlike the British crowns with which we are familiar, it is made up of a circuit of eight hinged gold panels which alternate between being enamelled with figures of the Old Testament kings or being encrusted with jewels. It has a high arch the goes from front to back and at the front a jewelled cross surmounts the central panel.

The crown embodies a rich symbolism which focuses on the front panel. It is set with twelve gem stones interspersed with pearls. It is a conscious evocation of the ephod worn by the Old Testament High Priests in the Temple at Jerusalem. By doing this the Holy Roman Emperors were claiming a priestly role as part of their authority and were ordained as part of their coronation. However the ephod is far more interesting than either the crown or the Holy Roman Emperors.

In the Old Testament the ephod appears to have been a metal breast-plate set with twelve gem stones. On these stones were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Among the many meanings of the ephod was the idea that the High Priest represented the tribes of Israel to God and God to the tribes of Israel. The ephod also had in a pouch on the back containing Urim and Thummim. These were two objects used to determine the will of God and may have been a pair of dice or amulets. Neither the ephod or Urim and Thummin were adopted as vestments by the early Church but we do have a stained glass window under the tower depicting the ephod.

The window depicts stories involving children in the Old Testament. The subject of the window was probably selected because of the window's proximity to the Baptistry. It is in baptism that Christians begin their journey with God hence stories depicting children being blessed at key stages of their lives were considered appropriate for this location. The right hand panel illustrates 'Hannah presents her son Samuel to the priest Eli for blessing' found in *1 Samuel 1:26-28*. In the scene Eli wears the robes of the High Priest as described in *Exodus 28:1-2* and *Exodus 29:4-5*. He wears a white linen under-tunic with sleeves; a blue sleeveless over tunic bordered with embroidered pomegranates and fringed with golden bells; a sash and a turban fronted by a gold plate on which is inscribed "Holy unto God". On Eli's chest is the ephod set with twelve gems each engraved with one of the names of the twelve tribes making clear his representative role before God and the people.

At a recent training session I reminded our servers of their representative role in our worship. They carry the Cross, Candles and Gospel book, all symbols of Christ and his presence among us. Whether we are the Holy Roman Emperor, an Old Testament High Priest, a server on a Sunday, a member of the clergy or a member of the congregation we all have a representative role. For some of us that representative role is reinforced by special vestments but all of us by virtue of our baptism are called to represent Christ. We share in the Royal Priesthood of all believers representing Christ to the world by our actions and the world to Christ by our prayers.

On 3rd July at the 9.30am Eucharist we will welcome two other representatives of Christ, Revd La Stacey and Revd Kate Sladen who will have been ordained Deacon the day before. You will notice that at a Eucharist Revd La and Revd Kate wear their stole (the long coloured scarf) like a sash. The stole is a symbol of a Priest or Deacon's authority to represent Christ. The Priest's stole was probably copied from the stole of an ancient Roman Magistrate who represented the authority of the Emperor. The Deacon's stole has a different origin. The ancient Romans didn't have pockets in their clothes. If you were a wealthy person your slave walked behind you carrying a towel over their shoulder for you to use. Deacons were originally the assistants of the Bishop and carried the servant's towel as a symbol of their function. Over time the towel became the long strip of material we see today.

At their ordination on 2nd July Revd La and Revd Kate may not receive a gold crown or wear a jewelled ephod but as Deacons they will receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit to represent the loving service of Christ among us and the wider community. I am sure by our prayers and actions we will help Revd La and Revd Kate to make the transition into their new representative role, of being an ordained minister called to represent Christ in a new and public way.

Every + Blessing,

Fr. Guy