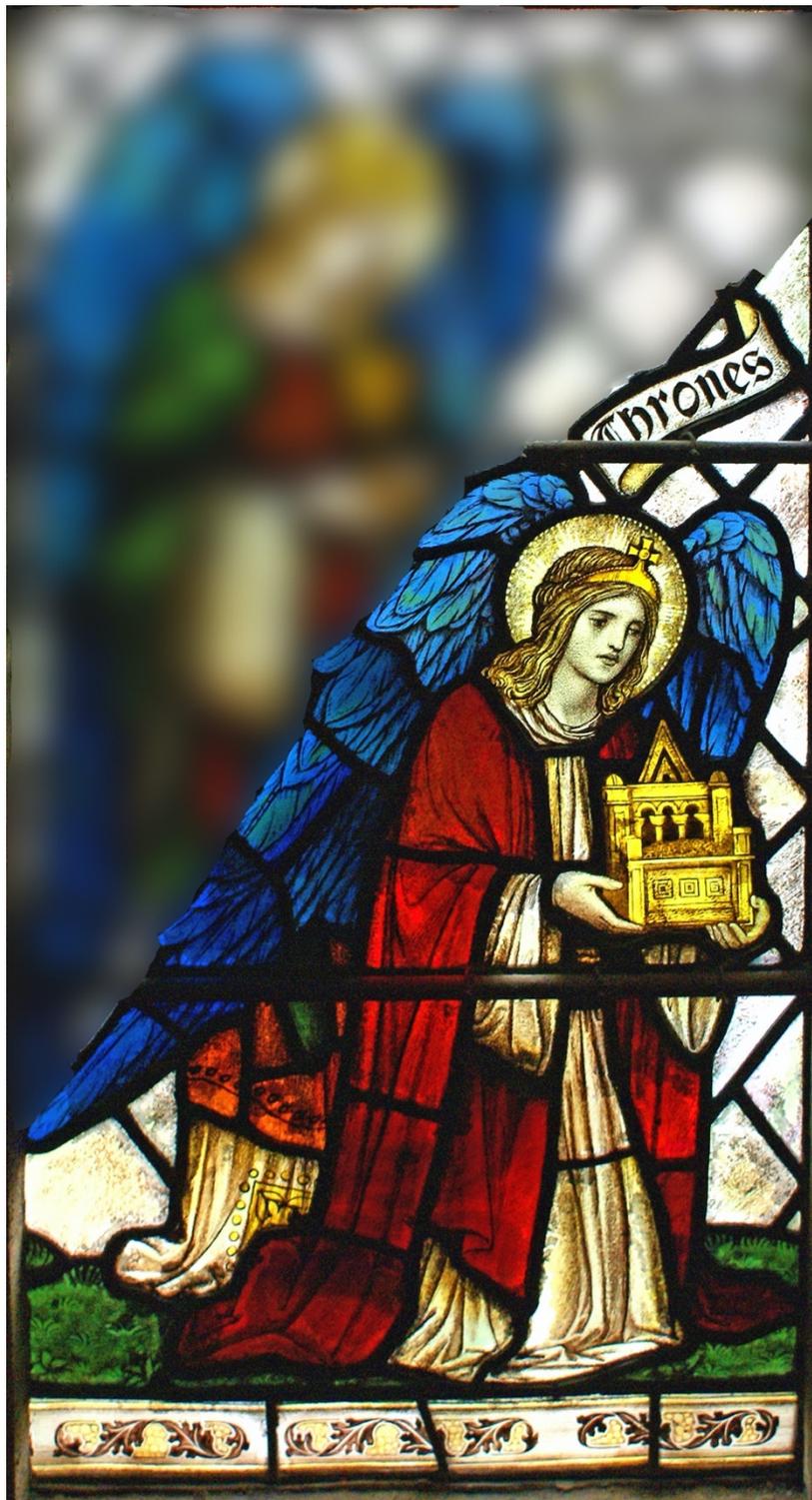


Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



Thrones

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Reading: Revelation 4

At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and cornelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.'

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,

'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.'

Commentary

Thrones are the third highest in the angelic order. They are mentioned by St Paul in his letter to the Colossians (1:15): “for in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether **thrones** or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.”

They are also called ‘God bearing,’ and they are associated with God’s justice and authority. (Psalm 9:4 ‘Thou hast sat upon a throne, O Thou that judgest righteousness.’) They have (as one might expect) as their symbol a throne, as in our stained-glass window.

In Heaven, in the midst of the angel hosts was the throne of God, glimpsed (as we have already seen) by the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and also by Daniel and in the New Testament by St John the Divine. Each tried to describe what he had seen, clearly stretching words to their limits to convey something of the transcendent Glory that they had witnessed. The angels in these four throne visions in the Scriptures – the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones – became the highest rank in the Christian angel hierarchy.

Daniel (chapter 7) saw the throne of God set over a great sea and in the midst of the heavenly host. The throne was made of fire and had wheels of fire and from it flowed fire and on it sat the Ancient of Days. These fiery wheels were called in Hebrew ‘Ophanim’ and were later identified as angels, as ‘Thrones’ in fact. They represent the omnipresence of God:

He could 'move', in other words 'be present', anywhere and He sees all things.

St John's vision of heaven in the Book of Revelation is the only vision of the throne in the New Testament. Some scholars have identified the twenty-four elders who fall down in worship before God, as the angelic Thrones.

Traditionally, the Thrones represented the brilliance of God's all-seeing wisdom, which enlightens all things, and are living symbols of God's justice and supreme authority. In the Book of Revelation, the throne of God represents God's sovereignty over all things and the 24 elders (or angelic Thrones) worship through their confession of God's worth, glory and honour. They are able to serve God because they acknowledge that He is the source of all authority and power, wisdom and might.

Meditation

Reflect on the words of the Lord's Prayer:

'For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory.'

It is so easy to put ourselves at the centre of things, and to believe that all things revolve around ourselves. How we love the power to control; the might to get our own way; the force to manipulate to our own advantage without thought of the effect on others; the capacity to be always in control. In Christ we see the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory manifested in one who is good, generous, peaceful, merciful, kind, loving, and forgiving. God was at the centre of His being and when we,

like the 24 elders, bow down in humility before the source of all power and authority, and love and trust Him whose love is at the heart of all things, then we put God at the centre of our being too.

Prayer

Creator God, we glimpse your beauty
in setting sun, mountain top, eagle's wing.

We sense your power in thunder crash,
lightning flash and ocean's roar.

Creator God we praise you

Precious Jesus, we see your love
stretched out upon a cruel cross.

We stand in awe at your sacrifice,
pure love poured out for humankind.

Precious Jesus we praise you

Holy Spirit, we see your power
in lives transformed, hearts on fire.

We listen for your still, small voice,
comforting, guiding, calling.

Holy Spirit we praise you.