

**St Botolph's Church Worthing**  
**Trinity Sunday 19 June 2016**  
**Luke 12: 22-37, 1 John 2: 15-17**  
**Father Roger Walker**

Today we celebrate St Botolph's day as our Patronal Festival. I have no idea why an obscure East Anglian saint should have been chosen as Patron Saint for a Church in Worthing: if some of you know, please tell me afterwards. I do know, however, that St Botolph was better known in the Middle Ages than he is today. He was the English Patron Saint of travellers, and there were four churches dedicated to him in London by each of the ancient gates in the city wall, so that travellers could pray for, or give thanks for, a safe journey. Today his role has been taken over by St Christopher and few people would now know of him.

So, rather than concentrating on St Botolph, of whom we know very little, let's rather think of all of God's saints and what their lives can show to us. It would be hard to find a better definition of a saint than the words we heard this morning from 1 John: listen to it again.

*'Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not for him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has or does – this comes not from the father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.'*

When we hear those words we feel a definite sense of unworthiness – for we know only too well that we do love the world. That is St John's shorthand for all the material things that separate us from God, and it is no coincidence that whenever a part of the world becomes richer, faith in God seems to decline.

It is among the poorer nations of the world that faith in Jesus Christ is growing and his Church is growing, while we in wealthy Western Europe are struggling, and aren't we described well? We want things: cravings and lust of the eyes, in St John's words. When we get them we boast of what we have and what we have done. If you don't believe me, just listen to a few conversations around you when you are in the town 'Oh, that dress looks lovely' 'I would really like to buy that' 'Do you know what our house is worth now?' 'We've just come back from our second cruise this year'

We would not be at all surprised to hear that conversations like this have no place in a saint's life. We would be amazed to hear someone say 'The sense of love for God and for each other in our Church is amazing'. If they are talking about the Church, it is much more likely to be a complaint about the shortcomings of the Vicar!

So how can we apply these simple words from 1 John to ourselves? First of all by making a conscious effort to apply to ourselves the tenth commandment, 'thou shalt not covet'. Don't allow yourself to fixate on what you have not got and how much you would like to have it. Instead, look back

down your lives and see how, in the providence of God, things you needed – rather than wanted – did come into your life.

‘Trust God rather than covet, and then guard your tongue. St James’ famous words about curbing the tongue are usually taken to mean ‘don’t say unkind things about people’ – but he also says that the tongue ‘makes great boasts’, and our natural temptation to boast about what we have, are and do should be curbed. We all know how uncomfortable we feel when someone who has more than us tells us about it, usually at great length! So the Do Nots about living a Saint-like life are ‘don’t covet and don’t boast’. God’s saints aren’t marked by what they don’t do, but by what they do: and central to the life of St Botolph and every saint in the calendar is that they loved God.

We know we should love God, but that love may have become a bit tepid and be expressed in rather repetitive ways. How can we strengthen and deepen our love for God? That’s a huge subject that needs several sermons, not just a few minutes to express. But probably the most important thing we can do is to make time for God. Just as human love does not flourish if a couple don’t make time to be together, so too with God and us.

We need to set aside a time each day to be quiet with him and, if possible, to go on a retreat once a year. There we can spend several days just concentrating on God, with all our worldly concerns left behind. This time with God should be filled with three things: reading the Bible, praying and just being quiet with him. Do this every day and your sense of God’s presence and your love for him will grow, and with it will your sense of love for other people and a desire to reflect God’s love to them.

If you read the lives of the Saints you cannot but be impressed with how much time they spend quietly with God - even those who were most active in his service. Also, how many of them made a conscious decision to turn away from sin and dedicate their lives to God. We want to lead lives that follow the examples of God’s Saints, and we see from St John’s words how there is both a positive and a negative part of this. The positive – ‘love God and love your neighbours’, and the negative ‘do not covet and do not boast’. We can do this but, like God’s saints, we really have to choose to do it – will we?

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

19.6.16