



**Homily for the National Celebration of  
St. David, Bishop and Patron of Wales**

**1<sup>st</sup> March 2019**

**St. David's Metropolitan Cathedral, Cardiff**

**Archbishop George Stack**

Two weeks ago, I was lucky to get into the British Museum in London to see an exhibition called “I am Ashurbanipal, King of the world, King of Assyria”. Ashurbanipal ruled from 669 – 631BC and built a fantastic palace and library in Nineveh, the ancient capital of what we now call Iraq. He conquered lots of other kingdoms, too, including Babylon, and took over its capital which today we call Baghdad. This land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates was the cradle of modern civilisation as the items on display in the British Museum show. The exhibition is closed, but many of the items remain in the Museum.

Can you imagine how impressed the people of Israel, the Jewish people, were with these powerful kingdoms and armies and civilisations all around them as they struggled to maintain their identity? But the Israelites had one great treasure that even King Ashurnipal with all his wealth and culture and power did not possess. Whilst he worshipped the gods of thunder and plague and war and many other idols, the Jewish people somehow discovered and responded to the revelation that there is only one God. In that revelation, they were freed from the slavery of placating many other turbulent deities which had control over the lives of other peoples. We read the about that amazing revelation and the history of salvation in what we call the Old Testament of the Bible – the Hebrew Bible. The Word of God in words of men.

Solomon became the king of Israel in about the year 970 BC. We heard a beautiful passage in this morning's National Service for St. David's Day. "You can have whatever you like" says God to the new king. "Power and palaces. Riches and wealth. Armies and slaves". And Solomon's answer rings down the ages. "Give me wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours which is so great?". (2nd Book of Chronicles 1-7).

On this National Day when we celebrate the history and the memory of our patron St. David, it is surely good to reflect on how "... to govern this people of yours which is so great". Good to ask what constitutes nationhood, and those things which contribute to the Common Good. What are the priorities and problems and challenges and opportunities which face us all as individuals and citizens, members of the different communities which make up our country. What are the common values which underlie a just society?

The Wisdom of Solomon is reflected and amplified in the words of Jesus which we have just heard. "You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you.

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Mark 10:43).

The presence of so many representatives of public life led by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff at this St. David’s Day service, is a reminder of the dedication and commitment of those who hold high office on our behalf. The Lord Mayor and her officials with members of local and national government. The presence of so many voluntary organisations witness to the ongoing dedication of unsung heroes who show care, compassion and challenge and inspiration to young and old alike. The presence of our educators, and health professionals, those who guard our laws and create a beautiful environment in our cities, towns and country. All of them motivated by that desire to create a “civilisation of love” which lies at the heart of any civilised society.

Solomon was allowed by God to build a great Temple in Jerusalem around the year 950 BC. It contained the Hall of Pillars, the Hall of Justice and the Hall of the Cedars of Lebanon. Barely 400 years later, in 587 BC, all this was destroyed by the conquering King Nebuchadnezzar. Israel invaded. Jerusalem laid low. The Temple destroyed. The people led off into exile once more. The displacement of people and the refugee crisis is nothing new. “By the waters

of Babylon, there we sat down, and there we wept as we remembered Sion. How could we sing the songs of Sion on an alien soil?” in that familiar song by Boney M.

So when the government of Wales launches its plan “Wales – a Nation of Sanctuary” it puts before our people a challenge and an opportunity. To welcome the stranger in our midst. To ensure they are treated with dignity and given access to those things which are essential to a dignified life. To share the culture and beauty and heritage of this nation with those who are dispossessed and have come to live amongst us. “Why not look after our own?” some people say. Those who have come from troubled lands to find the peaceful life we take for granted are our own. We are all children of the same God. It is our privilege to learn from those who have arrived in our midst something of their story too, the richness of their heritage and the suffering they have had to bear. Many of our communities have been enriched by engaging in that wonderful work of Sanctuary.

“Give me wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours which is so great”. Our patron St David governed the people of his own time with learning, holiness, humility and dedication. The circumstances of our present world may be different to those experienced by David. But the lessons for

life which he taught remain as true today as in the 6th century world of David. “Serve one another. The greatest among you must be your servant”. Do the little things well said our patron St. David. “Then the big things will take care of themselves”. Those are my words!

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