

23rd October 2020

Serious

**“Seriousness is the Christian’s balance
which keeps him being overturned with vanity.”**

Thomas Watson, The Christian Soldier, or ‘Heaven taken by storm’, 1669

On a recent visit to the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset, I was intrigued by a small, bronze statue outside St Patrick’s Chapel, close to the entrance of the Abbey precincts. It depicts Seric, a 10th century Glastonbury monk, who went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury. Seric is on a small horse and he’s being stopped by a ragged child who’s holding out a begging bowl. It’s a tender and thought-provoking depiction of all that Seric and his brothers stood for. In a world where people were crying out for alms, he stopped to help a pleading child.

We’re told that Seric was labelled *Seric the Serious*, though no one really knows why. Perhaps it was because of his learning, or maybe it’s simply a transliteration of his Latin name, *Serio*. Either way, the bronze sculpture of Seric and the pleading child made me stop and have a serious think. And I came to the conclusion that Seric was serious because dealing with poverty and need is a *very* serious business indeed.

Official figures show that in 2018-19 there were 4.2 million children living below our current definition of the poverty line in the UK. In a class of 30 children, that means 9 would be living in poverty. 44% of children living in lone-parent families are in poverty, and lone parents face a higher risk due to the lack of an additional earner, low rates of maintenance payments, gender inequality in employment and pay, and childcare costs. Childcare and housing costs take the biggest toll on families’ budgets. And the Covid-19 crisis is making all of that much worse.

Thomas Watson pointed out in the 17th century that being “overturned with vanity” is not the way to go. We need to be serious about the needs of others. That’s the Christian’s purpose, but it’s surely right for us all. Poverty, in any form, is a serious business for a civilised society. When, like Seric of old, are we really going to take *that* seriously?

A prayer for today

*Loving God, help me to be aware of the needs of others
and to stop and think what I might do about them. Amen*

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