

The response of a capable wife

The sermon preached by the Very Rev Kenny Rathband
at the Eucharist on 15 November 2020, St Margaret's Eve

The readings were Proverbs 31.10–13, 25–31, 2 Timothy 1.1–7 and Luke 11.33–36

“A capable wife who can find?”
Well, Malcolm Canmore certainly did!

In fact he found a wife who was far more than merely capable. He found a woman of great character and faith – a woman who in her own way transformed his life and the lives of all with whom she came into contact.

Proverbs may offer a list of virtues, but such virtues will always be mere words if they are not embodied.

For those of us of the other sex, I wonder what wisdom Proverbs would offer if the question were: “A capable husband who can find?” I’ll let you ponder that one!

The list offered by Proverbs reads in some ways like a Janet and John book of old, when everything in the garden was rosy.

If only life in reality was like that. But it isn't. Reality is not always as tidy and efficient. Life can be challenging.

Perhaps it is for this reason that Margaret is deemed to be saintly. She married a fiery and warlike man. A man of battle and action, not words and niceties. Yet she in her own and faithful way transforms such a character.

As one commentator writes, “All this Margaret in the end achieved by a mixture of personal saintliness, political tact and ecclesiastical sagacity, in a way no church courts or church dignitaries could have done.”

In short, Margaret put her faith in Jesus and the message of the gospel and in so doing lived a life of grace.



Jesus said to the crowds, “If your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.”

Words that Margaret must have taken to heart.

So what made her a saint? Did she wait for Malcolm to come home, with the fire lit and his medieval slippers waiting for him? Did she greet him with the words: “Had a nice day on the battlefield dear?” I somehow doubt it!

In order to gain the respect and trust of others she herself would have had to be strong.

Let us not paint her into a stained-glass image of meekness and mercy too lightly or quickly. Let us instead think of what it must have been like living in such troubled times, even with the comforts of the court.





Margaret was a woman of great devotion. The words of Paul to Timothy from our second lesson are well suited to her: "I am grateful to God – whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did – when I remember you constantly in my prayers day and night."

The saints who have gone before us are not necessarily remembered because they were without fault, or because they had special gifts. They are remembered because they stand as beacons of encouragement, of people who have sought to live a life of faith.

They stand as lamps on a lampstand, shining for others to follow. They do not make themselves the focus, but rather they shine by reflecting the light of Christ and the service of others.

Last year we rejoiced together in joyful times as we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary. One year later things are quite different as we find ourselves in the midst of a global pandemic.

It is easy to worship when the sun is shining and the sky is clear. It is not so easy when the going is rough and the clouds of despondency wait to be unfurled.

Perhaps it is here that the words of our Collect offer us guidance and comfort.

God, the ruler of all, who called your servant Margaret to an earthly throne and gave her zeal for your Church and love for you people that she might advance your heavenly kingdom; mercifully grant that we who commemorate her example may be fruitful in good works and attain the glorious crown of your saints.

Proverbs asked the question "A capable wife who can find?" Margaret did her best to respond, and for that we today offer grateful thanks.

Amen.

The image used overleaf was taken from the wonderful account of Margaret's life in the Clerk of Oxford's blog, which is available at <https://tinyurl.com/y5o9ay9u>.