

HOMILY by Canon Jack Lindquist of St. Paul's Cathedral, San Diego, on the presentation of the painting "Hilda Of Whitby, A Light In the Darkness," by the artist Hilda Pierce: November 16, 2008.

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

O God, we hold our talents, our abilities and resources, in trust from You. Help us to use them as a light in the darkness. Amen.

My dear friends,

Today's Gospel, the Parable of the Talents, is not only the ultimate stewardship text; it also explains the people we are honoring today: two women named Hilda and a family named Roseveare. They used their talents to bring light in the world.

The first Hilda is portrayed in this wonderful painting. She was Hilda, Abbess of Whitby, found in the Episcopal book of Lesser Feasts and Fasts under the date of November 18th: a seventh century Celtic mother superior and church reformer who, in the so-called "Dark Ages" of England, built her own monastery (part of it for men and part for women), made it a center of learning and spiritual renewal, and ruled it with a bishop's authority, hence the crozier (the bishop's staff) in her hand. "A light in the darkness," indeed!

And the second Hilda is with us today, Hilda Pierce, a Jewish artist who created this painting of Saint Hilda. She is presenting it to St. Paul's in honor of Major William and Marjory Roseveare, a very loving and devout Church of England couple who, seventy years ago, in 1938, offered their home as a safe haven to Hilda and her parents, and thus saved them from certain death in a Nazi concentration camp. In her own words she says, "They restored my faith in humanity," and you can't have a brighter light in the darkness than that!

Hilda (then Hilda Harmel) was a sixteen year old Jewish schoolgirl standing on the curb when Adolph Hitler's long caravan of open limos rolled into Vienna on March 13, 1938. He was welcomed by millions of ecstatic Austrians, many of them shouting anti-Jewish curses to please the German Fuhrer. Yes, it was the Anschluss, Hitler's "annexation" of Austria into the Third Reich, and Hilda knew immediately that she and her parents had to get out of that country as soon as possible and hopefully join relatives in America, but how? "The red tape was endlessly long," she says, and there was usually a two-year waiting period for immigration to the United States. Where could they go for a safe haven? England, yes, perhaps England, but who would take them in, vouch for their visas, speak for them? They didn't know a soul in England!

Only Hilda's desperate determination drove her through all the bureaucracy, but she finally saw the American Chief Consul who got her a permit as a Jewish refugee child. Her parents couldn't leave yet, but she flew to England on August 15, 1938, and finally the Quakers located a family who would take her in, and in October of that year she became part of the Roseveare family in Crowley Down, Sussex, and a close friend of their daughter Brenda, who was her age. It was all like a dream come true, and the end of a nightmare. Now she could go to work on bringing over her parents.

But then the nightmare struck again the next month, for on November 9, 1938, came Kristallnacht, "The Night Of Broken Glass" (seventy years ago last Sunday), when the Nazis burned all the synagogues of Germany and Austria and vandalized all Jewish businesses..... and Hilda's parents, Julius and Eveline Harmel were still there! They had already lost their lovely home and antique furniture store. Now they were in danger of losing their lives! But the Roseveares finally got them visitor visas as domestic servants

(housemaid and gardener), and during the summer of 1939 they, too, arrived in Sussex and were reunited with their daughter..... and just in time. World War II began on September 3, 1939, with the German bombing of Warsaw, Poland, and no Jews travelled to England in wartime. They were taken to Auschwitz.

The Roseveares and all their Anglican friends and clergy made Hilda welcome exactly as she was and never tried to convert her. They respected her Jewish identity, but they invited her to be involved in their Church just as much as she liked. When she stayed with a Canon Williams and his family in the rectory of Balsham near Cambridge, she typed up the rector's sermons in order to work on her English; she helped his daughter Nancy teach a Sunday School class; and when Nancy played the ancient organ for the choir and Sunday Services, an organ that had to be pumped by hand, that, too, was something Hilda loved to do. Indeed, she came to love the Church of England and the Anglicans, especially at Christmas with all the candles and carols. The Roseveares had brought her into a time of peace and hope, of love and joy.

Hilda's American visa came through in November, 1939, and she sailed for New York; her parents could follow and join her in Chaggo in 1943. But all these years since she has never forgotten that Christian couple, William and Marjory Roseveare, who were her "light in the darkness;" she is presenting this painting of "Hilda Of Whitby, A Light In the Darkness," to St. Paul's in their honor today, and she will have an enlarged picture of them at her table in the Great Hall after this Eucharist. Do stop by to thank her and see them. And every time we look at this painting, let us think of them, and let us remember Jesus' words to us all: "YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE THE WORLD,

THAT ALL MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GLORIFY YOUR
FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN.

Canon Richard Lief will now bless and dedicate the painting for our
devotional use, and then I will introduce Hilda Pierce to you all.