

10th Aug 2020, Feast of St. Lawrence, deacon.

II Cor. 9:6-18, Jn. 12:24-26

At every Mass we join in with the everlasting praise of God by His saints in the heavenly court, especially when we say or sing the Sanctus (the Holy, Holy, Holy). In the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), the priest has the option of listing a number of early saints who were venerated by the Church in Rome, and one of these is St. Lawrence whose feast is celebrated today.

Like a lot of these martyrs whose names are familiar to us, not a great deal is known about the detail of their lives. St. Lawrence was one of the “seven deacons” of Pope St. Sixtus II, and was martyred by the Emperor Valerian four days after him. Before his death, St. Lawrence was asked to gather all the Church’s treasure as it was to be confiscated. Complying with this request, he gathered together all the poor who served and were served by the Church, and said to the prefect, “Here is the Church’s true treasure.” For this, a fire was prepared, and St. Lawrence was strapped to a grid-iron or grill, and was slowly roasted to death. Tradition has it that he called out that one side was cooked perfectly and he was ready to be turned! This is why he is always portrayed as holding a grid-iron, as in this picture from the reredos on the sanctuary at St. Joseph’s.



Both of the readings for today’s feast reflect sowing and reaping. St Paul says, “Thin sowing means thin reaping” (2 Cor.9:6) and “God loves a cheerful giver” (v.7) which is a quote from the Old Testament book of proverbs. St. Lawrence cheerfully gave to the Church in his service to the poor, and equally cheerfully gave his life for Christ. In the Gospel, we hear Jesus teaching that those who seek to keep their lives for themselves in this world are like the grains of wheat that do not germinate, but those who serve Him will produce much fruit. The grain of grains is of course our Lord Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice on the Cross has produced the fruit of the glory of heaven for us all. Next time we see the image of St. Lawrence on the reredos at Mass, or hear his name in the list of saints in the Roman Canon, think about his gathering of the Church’s treasure together, and ask ourselves, what is my greatest treasure?