

Thought for the Week

Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

Wednesday 16th September

Hildegard of Bingen

1 Corinthians 2. 6 -13

Tomorrow the church remembers Hildegard of Bingen, a rather extraordinary woman from the 12th century, a period when the earliest parts of our present Cathedral were built. Hildegard lived in Germany. From early childhood, Hildegard experienced visions and at 15 she took vows as a nun.

Hildegard was not locked away from the world though, nor did she have her head in the clouds as a mystic. She was a prominent figure in European society, she influenced many people of power and social standing, she corresponded with rulers. For a woman at that time this must have been unusual, so Hildegard is one of my heroes.

She was rather a polymath; she was very musical, a composer of hymns and chants. She wrote poetry, she wrote theology, she wrote medical handbooks and books about nature. Some think her the founder of scientific natural history in Germany. She even wrote a play. She spoke out in the prophetic tradition about the ills of her time and her letters to royalty did not pack their punches.

Not surprisingly she became abbess of her community and it grew under her leadership, moving to bigger premises and opening daughter houses as well.

Last year when we were still singing – remember that? – the Girls' Choir sang Choral Evensong on this day and I remember talking to them about Hildegard. They sang one of her compositions as an anthem. There are more surviving chants by Hildegard than by any other composer from the entire Middle Ages, and she is one of the few known composers to have written both the music and the words. This is an extraordinary record for anyone, let alone a woman of that time.

What a good role model for girls today – a woman of 9 centuries ago, in medieval Europe, living in a Benedictine convent, who had such a lasting effect, who left such a legacy. Who would have thought it.

And I wonder what St Paul would have thought about it. But then, perhaps he would not have been surprised in the least – his words about wisdom, the wisdom of God, and how it contrasts with the wisdom of this age, show that he was well aware of how God often works in surprising ways and through surprising people. When the Spirit that is from God is received, then there is no telling what may happen; what gifts may be bestowed, what understanding and what calling. Paul himself was perhaps the most surprising advocate of the Christian faith in his time; as well as the most effective and far reaching in his influence. And how could that be? Because, in his words, 'we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit'.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort,
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*