

When Prince William decided to marry Kate Middleton, he gave her a very interesting piece of jewelry: his mother's engagement ring. Now, that wouldn't have been an unusual choice for most people. Plenty of people give their fiancée a family heirloom for their engagement. I myself was privileged to give my wife her great-aunt's diamond ring for our engagement. It's a fairly common thing to do.

But this ring wasn't any ordinary ring. First of all, it was massive. A \$45,000 mountain of precious gems. An 18 carat pure blue sapphire surrounded by 14 one carat white diamonds. It's the type of ring that, a century from now, you can just see sitting in a glass case with other a dozen other crown jewels. A treasure fit for royalty.

And yet, a sullied treasure as well. Because it was Princess Di's ring. And it was now a treasure bearing the dirt of adultery. Of betrayal. Of scandal. Of divorce. It was a treasure remembered both for when Diana first put it on and for when she first took it off.

As much as that ring was a symbol of royalty, it was also a symbol of how wrong royalty can go. Of how fallible kings and queens still are. And, I can only imagine that in giving that ring to Kate, Prince William hoped somehow to restore some dignity to his family.

In our Old Testament lesson for today, the prophet Malachi calls us God's treasured possession. We are the crown jewels of his kingdom. Symbols of his sovereignty and majesty. His incredible power. His unending love.

Yet I can't help but wonder how much dignity is left in these precious stones. After all, we're sullied treasures as well. We bear the dirt of adultery and betrayal and scandal and divorce. Malachi himself says as much just a few verses earlier, at the end of chapter 2:

*"Judah has been faithless [that is, unfaithful and adulterous], and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god."*

It's an image we see from the prophets time and time again. Israel, the adulterous. Judah, the unfaithful. Jerusalem, the prostitute. Images of defilement and betrayal and scandal... from God's people. From God's chosen nation. From those who were once called to be a nation of priests, serving the one true God.

But an accurate description as well. The books of Kings and Chronicles are not a favorable review of Israel and Judah. They include a lot of sin. A lot of idolatry. A lot of just plain corrupt behavior, from kings and commoners alike. It's a humbling record of just how sinful even the saints of God can be. People not that much different than us.

Why? Because we chase after the things of this world too. Malachi makes the point here that even when we're not chasing after foreign gods, we're chasing after those people who will inevitably tempt us with foreign gods. We know the consequences of these actions. We know the temptations that we're bringing upon ourselves. And we do it anyway.

So we may not be chasing after greed itself. But are we chasing after being a little more stingy in our giving to the church and charities, just to be safe? We may not be chasing after lust itself. But are we chasing after the bar with the pretty waitress who flirts with us? We may not be chasing after hatred itself. But are we chasing after judging our neighbor before we really know all the facts?

It's not always the foreign gods themselves we bring into our homes. It's the things of this world that we marry ourselves to that do that all on their own. And in God's eyes, that is an abomination. That is profaning his sanctuary. That is committing adultery on God almighty.

This is strong language. God does not call little things an “abomination”. He does not accuse people of profaning his sanctuary unless they have committed a truly damnable sin against him. People who are guilty of abominations and profaning the Lord's sanctuary are usually swallowed up by the earth or struck dead by a plague.

Which is why it's utterly and completely baffling that, after all that, he still calls us his treasured possessions. After a verdict that should be a death sentence, we are still his crown jewels. His royal treasure. And it's not by anything we did that we still have that status. We can't clean that dirt off any more than Kate Middleton could use soap and water to wash the scandal of the royal family off her ring.

We are the treasured possessions of God only through the blood of Jesus Christ. We are the diamond ring that Jesus put on as he hung on the cross. We are the extravagant love that declares to the world: Jesus Christ has come into His kingdom.

And it wasn't by some opulent coronation ceremony with trumpets and feasts and golden crowns and majestic thrones. No, it was by the cries of a crowd, yelling, “Crucify him!” It was by being offered soured wine when he just needed a drink. It was by being crowned with a circle of thorns on his head. It was by taking his place as king over all the earth, not on a throne of gold. But on a cross of wood.

Jesus had none of the trappings of a king. But he didn't need them. He had his one crown jewel. He had his one treasured possession. He had you.

And with his own blood, he washed you clean of the adultery of sin. And the betrayal of disobedience. And the scandal of immorality. And the separation of divorce. By the waters of Holy Baptism, he washed you and made you his own. A pure white diamond. A member of his bride, the Church.

Malachi tells us that God has written a book of remembrance. A book of life. A book with the names of all those who fear the Lord and esteem his name. For that is what defines us as God's people.

We are people who fear God. People who fear God's Law. God's judgement. God wrath. We fear God. For we know that we are sinners. And yet, we also know how much God has done for us. And we esteem his name for that act of sacrifice and that gift of grace.

We fear God and we esteem his name. The name of Jesus Christ. And so like that thief on the cross next to Jesus, who feared God and acknowledged his sin, yet esteemed God's Son and declared him guiltless, we are included in this book of remembrance. He remembers us and promises us a place in paradise with him.

God claims us as his own. And a wonderful exchange happens. For God did not spare his only begotten son who was obedient to the point of death on a cross. Instead He spares us as a man spares his son who serves him. He spares us as his own children. And he declares us righteous.

Though we were a sullied treasure, God has cleansed us by his blood and adopted us as his children. And now we await the day when Christ our King restores our dignity. Not with the feeble hope of a human royal family, with all its fallibility. But with the certain hope of God's never changing promise.

We await the day when the world will see us not as the sullied, sinful people who call themselves Christians, but fall victim to the same temptations, the same failures, the same tragedies, and the same death as everyone else. No, instead, we await the day when the world will see us as the treasured possessions of a king who comes on the clouds of glory.

The king who is the very image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation. The creator of every throne, dominion, ruler, or authority that has ever existed. The king of kings and the Lord of Lords. The head of the Church. Jesus Christ our Lord.

We await the fulfillment. Not of our salvation. That was done long ago. No, we await the fulfillment of our kingdom. The fulfillment of Christ's perfect kingdom. A kingdom where we will shine like diamonds and live in paradise. A kingdom that will never end. Amen.