

**Message for Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2018**  
**(Festival of Christ the King)**

*(John 18.33-37, 2 Samuel 23.1-7, Ps 132.1-12, Revelation 1.4b-8)*

Today marks the end of our 2018 liturgical calendar and it is at this point, just before moving into the season of Advent that we celebrate the festival of Christ the King.

This is a festival that is greatly cherished by many and so it may come as a surprise to some of us to learn that this feast day was not celebrated prior to December 1925.

It was instigated by Pope Pious XI in an attempt to reverse a trend in society that seemed to be placing ever greater value in power, prestige and possessions, ahead of Christ's example of loving service.

Ironically Pope Pious used the symbol of a 'king', a symbol which is representative of worldly prestige, power and possessions. It was also a time in history when the world was turning from Kings and Queens to more democratic ways of government.

This is all very interesting for we can look back now as the 20<sup>th</sup> century has come and gone and we might think of all the changes that came about during this time. So many lives lost in senseless wars, such intolerance, greed and hatred can be seen in the world today and we might well ask whether 'Christ the King' can be thought of as a meaningful symbol for people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The gospel reading for today comes from John and we hear very clearly Jesus telling Pilate, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.'

Jesus, on more than one occasion in the Gospels makes it clear that his mission is not what the people were expecting. They believed that Jesus had indeed come as their messiah; but in their minds this meant that he would lead them to victory in battle and they would be free from Roman occupation.

Jesus makes it clear that this is not what his Kingdom is all about. For the Jewish people all those centuries ago and for followers of Christ today, this can create tensions in how we live. What makes us, as Christians, distinctive in the world? Some might be forgiven for quickly responding that there really isn't much difference at all.

How does the church stay true to the teachings of Jesus and at the same time remain relevant and able to be of service to the community at large? The church is capable of so much good but we all know that there are times when the church makes itself distinctive in ways that are unhelpful by being so fixed in a certain stance that others move further away, viewing the church as archaic or even detrimental to society.

I remember reading of a poll carried out in the UK a few years ago which asked members of the public if the Church of England was considered to make a positive contribution to society. Now, although people over 55 agreed that this was the case, the 30-55 year olds were more or less neutral, and the under 30's strongly disagreed.

When asked why this was the case, the response was that it most likely had to do with the church's perceived homophobia, the child abuse scandals, and issues regarding the appointment of women bishops, in other words gender equality.

Now this poll applied to the UK but I would venture to suggest that it probably isn't too dissimilar in Australia. In the 2011 Australian Census nearly 30% of millennials (i.e. people aged between 25 and 34) declared that they had no religion. Of course the census figures will not tell us if indeed they seek something other to take the place of organised religion in their lives or if indeed it is God's Kingdom they seek without even realising it.

Frederick Buechner, theologian and author, I believe would reply that they are most definitely seeking. He writes,

'If we only had eyes to see and ears to hear and wits to understand, we would know that the Kingdom of God in the sense of holiness, goodness, beauty is as close as breathing and is crying out to be born both within ourselves and within the world; we would know that the Kingdom of God is what we all of us hunger for above all other things even when we don't know its name or realise that it's what we're starving to death for.'

Strong words indeed but I think in his most eloquent writing there lies a great truth. Sometimes people search for truth, for love without even knowing they do it. When Pilate asked Jesus, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Sometimes this truth is loud and clear to us, sometimes it is distorted by outside interference, and sometimes it is just a whisper, a slight vesper of cool air that brushes our cheek, something we don't quite understand. In it all, God waits for us.

Buechner goes on to say -

'The Kingdom of God is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. We glimpse it at those moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. We catch sight of it when at some moment of crisis a strength seems to come to us that is greater than our own strength. The Kingdom of God is where we belong. It is home and whether we realise it or not, I think we are all of us homesick for it.'

So let us not despair when it seems that people don't always understand that God's Spirit is within them. God works within each one of us and we are all at different stages of our spiritual journey, whether we sit in church each Sunday or whether we search for God in other places, or whether we have not yet heard the small still voice within.

For a number of years, I used to worship in a church that had a very large, very beautiful stained-glass window that depicted Christ as Christ the King. Christ had a crown on his head, one hand was held up in blessing and in the other he held a bible on which were drawn the symbols for the Alpha and the Omega.

As we heard in our reading from Revelation today 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'.

The window was indeed a powerful image and I would say that many people who came into the church couldn't help but be drawn to it and feel reverence when they gazed upon it.

However I also believe that while this powerful image is one way of thinking of God, that same God is just as importantly Christ the Servant King. Time and again, Jesus told his followers that this was his path. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. God waits for us, patiently and with love. God doesn't come to take us by force, but in love and service.

I like to think that when Pope Pious introduced the festival of Christ the King, this is exactly the type of king he had in mind; a king who triumphed over all worldly preoccupation with power, wealth and prestige and replaced all these things with love, compassion and service to those most in need.

Following the example of a Servant King is not an easy path. But as followers of Christ, we are called to follow his example and in the way we live our lives there will be moments when others will catch a glimpse of the holy, the divine.

Of course, it is also true for each one of us that worldly values can swamp our best intentions. It is in these moments that we take a step back and reflect on the life lived by Jesus – which began with birth in a stable, his teaching, healing, activism for the poor, the needy and the outcast, his humility and faith and his death on a cross. It is in prayer and contemplation that we are able to reset our priorities.

As we begin to think about the forthcoming season of Advent, where can we play our part in God's Kingdom? What part of Jesus' life can we look to and think that perhaps here in some small way I can help in enabling the Kingdom of Christ, the Servant King to be known more fully in the world.

Let us pray,

Holy and loving God, on this festival of Christ the King, help us to reflect on the true meaning of God's Kingdom. May we be mindful and reach out to those in need, the vulnerable in our community, those who will struggle in the coming Advent season. May we listen for your truth and live according to your will. We pray in the name of Jesus, the one who teaches us to live in love. Amen