

## Christ the King

22 11 09

Eternal Father,  
whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven  
that he might rule over all things as Lord and King:  
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit  
and in the bond of peace,  
and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet.

My text may be found in John's gospel chapter 18 and verse 33:

'Are you the King of the Jews?'

Jesus stands accused before Pontius Pilate, the Procurator of Judea. Pilate is not best pleased. It is the eve of the Passover and the last thing he wants or needs is this: trouble from the Jews. I can't imagine he particularly liked his post as Governor of Judea but it was political preferment and if he did well here, he might well, in due course, hope for something better, something more civilised. But at present Pilate has a problem. The Jewish religious authorities have brought before him a man they are actually accusing of sedition, treason against Rome. What a joke! This stiff-necked people, who loathed Roman rule, Roman order, Roman culture, Roman values, were hardly likely to be co-operating with Rome by hauling before him this poor specimen on the trumped-up charge he was claiming to be their King and was inciting the people to revolt against the Emperor. As if!! Pilate would have been properly informed by his own network of

well-paid spies and he must have already judged Jesus to be a safe risk: anyone who advised the crowd to render to Caesar that which was Caesar's was giving sound advice on paying the Imperial tax, words he was scarcely going to query. No; what query was in Pilate's mind was why the Jewish authorities wanted this man Jesus removed from the scene. What had Jesus done to irritate them so much that they were prepared to have him executed by Rome?

Pilate's questions do not really get to the bottom of things. He is prepared to ask what is truth but is hardly prepared to take the time to wait for to an answer. To be fair, Pilate does not judge Jesus to be guilty. He is prepared to let Jesus off on his prisoner release scheme or just have him flogged, then let him go but no: the crowd shout for his blood and so Pilate, in a weak position, does what utilitarian politicians have always tended to do with their backs against the wall – he takes the easy way out by pleasing the voice of the people – such is democracy!

Still, Pilate does consciously and successfully manage to annoy the Jewish authorities. They want Jesus sentenced to death for claiming to be the King of the Jews so Pilate does and then has the charge published for all to see on a big notice on the cross that is slowly killing Jesus: INRI, Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum, Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews. What a joke: a naked, Jewish king, enthroned on a cross.

The joke too is that the Jewish authorities did not recognise Jesus as their Messiah, the anointed one of God who, it is prophesied, would restore the kingdom to Israel. The problem for them was Jesus was just not the type of king

they were expecting nor was the kingdom one which they would recognise. The joke is that as guardians of the will and word of God, they should not be listening to the evidence of their ears and of their eyes.

The joke is on Pilate too. He thought Jesus was innocent but he had him crucified anyway. In reality, Christianity would eventually subvert the values of the Empire when one day an Emperor would himself adopt the new faith as the state religion.

On Good Friday, Jesus was enthroned on the cross which was ultimately to become the distinguishing badge of a Christian. On the Feast of Christ the King we may reflect on Jesus, the Son of God sitting at the right hand of our Father in Heaven from whence one day he will come to judge the living and the dead. Yes, Christ is indeed Lord; yes he is indeed King and we, as his subjects, can freely chose to worship him and to respect his rule by trying to the best of our abilities to live a truly Christian life.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

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H: Sermon 21: Christ the King

