

Christ the King

21 11 10

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 today's gospel passage according to St Luke, chapter 23 and verse 42: 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

Remember, remember the Fifth of November,
Gunpowder, treason and plot;
I see no reason why Gunpowder treason
Should ever be forget

November is a month for remembering: All Saints, All Souls, Armistice Day Remembrance Sunday. There is a whole series of occasions, never mind Guy Fawkes Night, when we can remember the past and the people who may or may not be dear to our own hearts: the heroes of our faith; those who love who have died in the faith; members of the armed forces who gave their lives for us in war.

This month of remembering comes to a climax on this the last Sunday before Advent – Christ the King. In fact, the month of November in our Common Worship Lectionary is called the Kingdom Season and the liturgical colour, like Pentecost, is red.

It is odd to think of Jesus as King Jesus. For me, perhaps for you, we tend to focus on Jesus as our friend. The hymn, 'What a friend we have in Jesus', sums up our relationship with him. The reality of someone who likes us, loves us, who's always there for us, is a deeply attractive feature of our faith. At Christmas, we are encouraged to focus on the baby Jesus, the perfect child who according to 'Away in the Manger' was as good as the gold the wise men brought him as a gift – lying there in his make-shift crib, 'no crying he makes'. Then, in another hymn, there is the image of 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild'; there is an aura of peace about him, an inner calm, an essential sympathy that is deeply attractive. But both the image of the perfect child and the gentle man only tell half the truth; Jesus could be firm, sharp, angry, outraged, challenging. He possessed an inner steel that meant he was not afraid to confront hypocrisy and unrepentant wrongdoing and that he was prepared to suffer and die that we might live.

So Jesus is not only our friend but he is also our Lord and our King. Thomas recognises as much when he touches the risen Christ a week after Jesus rose from

the dead but for some people the word king is not a good image for what Christ is for not all of us are royalists at heart. The announcement of the forthcoming wedding of Prince William and Kate Myddleton was not only received enthusiastically but there was also a degree of negativity, complaints that it would be inappropriate to have a lavish royal wedding in a period of austerity! I used to be a Reader at the Church of King Charles the Martyr, Potters Bar and, as I'm sure you know, Charles I, king and Martyr, is remembered in our Anglican cycle of prayer on January 30th, the date of his execution. As a student at Oak Hill Theological College I was surprised to discover that the Vicar of St John the Evangelist, Palmers Green, was not going to mark that day in his church's cycle of prayer on the grounds that he was a Republican!

But the title and image of 'king' and the notion of 'kingdom' are strictly biblical and do reflect something of the full nature of Jesus the Christ, our Lord and our God. In the days that the Bible records, kings were considered the rulers of the people and governors of the land. If a King were the normal designation of those who are ultimately in charge, then it would be natural for those whom the Spirit inspired to talk of Jesus as King and that the divine order to be established as the kingdom. Don't we say as much when we pray the Lord's Prayer saying, 'Thy kingdom come'?

And in my text today, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' the repentant thief implicitly acknowledges Jesus' kingship by recognising that Jesus will enter into his kingdom. And Jesus' reply is gracious: 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' So saying Jesus is acknowledging that not only is the man right in considering him to be a king but that he too will join him in Paradise. Paradise, in its original meaning, was a walled garden, shaded with trees, fragrant with shrubs and flowers, cool and refreshing with the sound of water. It was a place of refreshment and relaxation reserved for the king and for his close companions. The repentant thief, like us I trust, will one day share in this image of the kingdom of heaven with our king, even Jesus Christ our Saviour and our friend.

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

21st November, 2010

H: Sermon 22: Christ the king

