

## Reflection for Christ the King by Rev'd Peter Shaw

Today we reach a triumphant end to our journey through the year from last Advent Sunday to this Feastday of Christ the King.

Today, we celebrate Christ, risen, ascended and glorified.

Throughout the year through Holy Scripture, we have been hearing the stories about Jesus and his life among us.

The journey has taken us through many different landscapes.

There have been the open plains of day to day life in ordinary times when we've heard the extraordinary stories of what Jesus said, how he healed the sick and reached out to the most unlikely and indeed least acceptable members of society, frequently incurring the displeasure of the Jewish authorities of the time,

There have been shadowy valleys of temptation, betrayal and death on the cross. Wilderness times of despair and devastating suffering.

But there have also been mountain tops of breath-taking excitement: The Resurrection, Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Because through Holy Scripture, we have this wonderful vision of Christ as King, we can take inspiration to return next week to the starting point of the Church's liturgical year and begin the journey again. Next week it'll be Advent Sunday and we'll begin again to prepare the way for the Lord

And next year, like this year, we will each be on our own journey. We, too, will walk through plains of ordinary day to day living, through our own valleys of shadow and up to our own high places of good news, joy and excitement. There'll be times in the journey when we'll get lost or discouraged, confused or stuck. But through all these times, Christ journeys with us, alongside us, and it is in the knowledge of what he has done through us, indeed continues to do through us in the Power of the Holy Spirit, which can give purpose and meaning to our lifelong journey of faith

But what sort of vision of Christ the King can give us the comfort, encouragement and motivation to keep going when the going gets tough, when the pressures and temptations of this very temporary world bear down on us and threaten to turn us away from Christ – the true light?

To answer that question, it is very interesting to look at the origins of this feast day.

It was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI (11<sup>th</sup>) as an antidote to Secularism.

In 1925, secularism was rising, and just to clarify what secularism actually means, it is defined as: **a way of life in which Man leaves God out of man's thinking and living, and organizes his or her life as if God did not exist.**

The Pope connected the denial of Christ as king - to the rise of secularism. Many Christians (including Catholics) had begun to doubt Christ's authority and existence, as well as the Church's place in continuing Christ's work on earth.

What exactly was happening? The Pope and the rest of the Christian world witnessed the rise of dictatorships in Europe, and saw Christians being taken in by these earthly leaders, and material things, resulting in a dangerous lack of respect for Christ, his Church on earth and all that they stood for.

Sounds familiar doesn't it!

The Pope intended this feast of Christ the King to proclaim in a striking and effective manner, Christ's royalty over individuals, families, society, governments, and nations. This feast day was subsequently adopted by Anglicans and Lutherans as well as other denominations.

Today for earthly leaders, in addition to politicians, we can add materialism and all the evils that accompany it when it gets out of hand:

the western world in spite of all its economic problems is materially rich – Materialism promises happiness and prosperity which is fine so long as it is taken in context. God wants

us to be happy and prosperous, but not at the cost of following the teachings of His son Jesus Christ our Lord, neglecting those in need, both spiritually and materially, around us. Sadly for so many people, materialism takes over their lives and they neglect the most important thing in their lives: their faith and following God.

The problem of God's people being led astray is also given a thorough airing in the reading we have just heard from the Prophet Jeremiah.

“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD”.

But what sort of King will inspire love, faithfulness and devotion from his followers without force or threat or false promises?

In the words of Holy Scripture we have heard throughout the year, and particularly today's reading from St Luke's Gospel, we see that this King is nothing like the kings of this world, and significantly, his power is not the sort of power this world understands.

The picture we are painted in this reading is certainly not what we would expect to see illustrating kingship, power and authority. Here are no fine robes but a naked and scarred body. His crown has no jewels, only vicious thorns. On his hands there are no rings of power, just the nails which fix him to a wooden cross – no golden throne. There are no courtiers or servants around him – just two criminals sharing his fate and an assorted crowd of soldiers and ghoulish spectators who taunt and mock him.

But before we turn away from this ghastly picture of cruelty and humiliation we see the words “This is the King of the Jews” and we hear the voice of an unlikely believer “remember me when you come into your kingdom”. Someone here has caught a glimpse of the glory that is hidden by the awfulness of this torture. And we hear another voice, the voice of authority coming from all the apparent defeat surrounding the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise”.

We heard the voices of mockery and hate. Now we hear the voices of faith and compassion and it makes us stop and wonder:

Is it possible in this picture that we are getting a glimpse of the sort of kingship that can meet our deepest inner needs, the needs we sometimes daren't even admit ourselves, and which certainly aren't met by the rulers and ways of this world.

Here on the Cross is a King who is prepared to suffer alongside us. This is not a King who holds himself aloof from ordinary folk. This is a King who experiences betrayal, savage injustice, brutal cruelty and utter humiliation and yet maintains his dignity and integrity. This is a King who has lived life as we live it, who has died as we must die but who now lives a new resurrection life. He reassures us and welcomes us into that same resurrection life in his Kingdom, where we will know the peace and healing for which we have longed.

The picture of Kingship painted in our Gospel story turns traditional earthly kingship upside down. It reaches out to us - calling us to offer ourselves to Christ the King and hopefully, we can sense what a difference this could make to our lives.

Next week we will begin again to tell the story of the coming of Jesus into the world as a vulnerable baby. We will again start looking forward to Jesus returning as Christ the King.

As we journey through the year, hearing again the stories of Jesus' birth and life, his ministry and teaching, his death and resurrection, we too will be travelling on our own journeys. We too will go through wilderness times of doubt and anxiety. We may well enter the Gethsemane's of anguish and despair. We will have mountain top experiences of excitement and good news. We will plod along through the everyday life of ordinary, routine, times, and through it all Jesus our King will journey with us – **if we let Him, if we let Him.**