

Christ the King 2021

We are certainly taken on an extraordinary journey in our readings today on this Feast of Christ the King, from the apocalyptic visions of both Daniel and St John the Divine, to the experience of almost feeling that we are standing beside the Lord at the place of judgement in front of Pontius Pilate as the crowd jeer from outside. I have always felt that Pilate seems apprehensive and ill at ease in his dealings with the strange man from Galilee – of which more anon.

The prophet Daniel gives us a stirring vision of the coming of the Messiah together with the understanding of the glory of his kingship: *His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.* The Book of Daniel is a complexed and intriguing book, and in passages like this there is no doubt that the writer is commenting of the political powers of the time, before (in a sense) saying that power is ultimately ephemeral. The history of humanity is littered with the ruins of such grandiose human constructions, as Shelley writes of in his poem Ozymandias:

“Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”

Daniel offers humanity a vision of something different in the reign of the Messiah, and there is no question that John the Divine uses this in *his* vision of this new dominion. Jesus Christ is affirmed as the true Messiah – the Lamb upon the throne. Here the universality of God’s love for humanity and indeed the whole of creation is revealed. Through his death on the cross, Jesus brings about the understanding of true life bounded in forgiveness and self-giving love. His resurrection draws all to the possibility of radical transformation, and ALL is achieved through love. Not only are we offered new life through his passion, death and resurrection, we are raised to the status of monarchs and priests of this radically different understanding of power. Peter says to us in one of his letters (1 Peter 2:9) *‘You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* For us, every day is an opportunity to explore more deeply the wonder of Christ’s self-giving love for us, in order that we might touch the world with the new life of the Kingdom. When St John calls Jesus Christ the faithful witness, he means that Jesus is the unique witness to God’s love for us. The one is the Alpha and the Omega doesn’t merely tell us about God’s love, he opens the floodgates of this love so that we may experience and participate in its sharing through our baptismal lives. When John says *‘So it is to be. Amen,’* a better translation might be: *‘This is the true. Amen’* John is telling us to forget anything else we have ever heard about truth. Here is the real deal. One only has to look at nations with authoritarian rule to know the Ozymandias route to ruin. Here is the real deal – the true kingdom.

John the Gospel writer also calls us to consider truth. Pilate is desperate to know the truth about Jesus yet through his own Roman education and experience of the world is profoundly sceptical. He is a poor judge unable to navigate the truth before him. He realises

that Jesus is innocent yet sweeps this aside to keep the mob happy. Ultimately truth and morality are always connected, and for us, the insight to be drawn to the fullest understanding is only possible through faith. The increasing fracture within Western society together with the breakdown of society has a direct correlation to the rejection and derision of Christianity.

The kingship of Christ is not some airy-fairy title conjured up by papal authority to bolster an Imperial Church. Rather, it was a recognition that in Jesus Christ we are called to display the dignity of God's overwhelming love for all people. Today's readings look back in time and look forward, but they are also very much about the present, because the kingship of Christ has been an ever-present reality since Calvary, since that moment when Christ demonstrated the infinite love of God for us through the cross.

In my video clip this week, I mention José Sánchez del Río. Now canonised, José was a fourteen-year-old Mexican who refused to betray his faith in Christ during the violent anti-religious persecution of Christians within the province where he lived in the 1920s. A devout boy, his persecutors tried to force him to denounce Christ by hanging a fellow Christian, but he refused – instead José encouraged the man, saying that they would soon meet again in Heaven after death. The boy was then taken through the streets of his town towards the cemetery and cut with machetes along the way. They even cut the soles of his feet; his parents and friends following and having to watch this despicable treatment. At times the officials stopped him and said, 'If you shout, "Death to Christ the King" we will spare your life'. José would only shout, 'I will never give in. Viva Cristo Rey!– *Long live Christ the King!* He was shot in the head twice and thrown into an open grave – two months short of his 15th birthday in 1928.

My dear friends, this is but one illustration of the way in which Christians through every age including our own have responded to hatred, violence, and persecution. We will probably never have to do so in the way José did, yet nevertheless we are called urgently, like him, to proclaim through our lives the saving grace we know in Jesus Christ the King; called to rise to the challenge to bear witness to this world the God of infinite love; called to reveal that the Kingdom Life is one which does indeed transform the world – achieved by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ, through the power of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. There is no other way to the fulness of life.



Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened. As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and

kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Revelation I: 4b-8

John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds;

every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him;

and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 18: 33-37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?'

Jesus answered, '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.' Pilate asked him, '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.'