

Christ the King

J ESUS SAID HE WAS A KING – but not of this world. Christians celebrated his reign as that of *The Messiah*, or *The Christ* which literally means – “*the anointed one*”, or, put another way, the Redeemer King who would defend the rights of the poor, and establish an everlasting reign of justice and peace.

The notion of Jesus as an earthly King and an anointer of earthly kingdoms came with the conversion to Christianity (for political reasons, it must be remembered) of Emperor Constantine in AD 313. Bishops started to wear the magenta robes of Roman Senators. Churches took on the shape of Roman Basilicas, while the government of the Church came to mirror that of the empire. The Christian liturgy imported all sorts of practices popular in the Roman Temples and in civic rituals. Priests and Bishops began to wear distinctive clothing – unlike Jesus who dressed in the garments of his region. Within a century Christian art began to depict Jesus dressed in royal robes, with a crown, a sceptre and an orb. Mary is often presented in similar dress, and starts to be called Queen of Heaven; by the high medieval period she is often cloaked in blue, the prerogative of kings at the time. **We cannot change history, but we do not have to be trapped by it either.**

I n the sacred scriptures we discover Christ our king is not found among earthly wealth and splendour but in desperate poverty, in homelessness, in seeking out and saving the lost, in getting down and dirty in the service of those on the margins of society. Would such groups would be welcome or at home in the lavish coronation ceremonies conducted in Christ the King’s name in the Westminster Abbeys of our world? If we take Christ’s kingship seriously, we cannot delude ourselves into understanding it in terms of worldly status. Jesus said, if any of us want to be first, we have to be the least, and the servant of all. The most moving moment when Jesus speaks of his kingship is from the Cross, when the good thief simply asks: “Remember me”. Jesus replies that being remembered by God *is* Paradise. The power of Christ the King is seen in his memory, in holding every person in this world close; in calling each one of us by name and challenging us to live lives of sacrificial love. It is seen where simplicity is valued, where there is a right relationship with the Earth, where the poor are recognised as special points of God’s revelation to the world. The test of those who live out the reign of

Christ is not whether we are successful, or have made it to *Who's Who*. Christ our King calls us to follow him in remembering all people, regardless of who they are, and being prepared to pay the price in fighting for the dignity of each person. And what is our reward for bringing Christ's reign to bear in our world? That Christ will remember us when we come into his kingdom

This Gospel that we have just heard is one of the most vivid parables that Jesus ever spoke. The lesson is starkly simple: God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to those in need. God's judgement does not depend on how many degrees we may have gathered at University, or the fame that we might have acquired, or the size of our bank account or property owned – but simply and shockingly, on the help we have given. This parable teaches us about the help which we must give.

It must be help in simple things – the things that anyone can do. We look to Jesus and he tells us what they are: giving a hungry person something to eat, a thirsty person something to drink, welcoming a stranger (especially when they enter our Church), cheering up a person who is sick, visiting someone who is held in jail. It is not a question of giving away thousands of pounds, or of writing our names in the annals of history. It is a case of giving simple, human help to the people we meet every day.

It must be help which is uncalculating. Those who helped – in our Gospel – did not think they were helping Christ – and thus piling up eternal merit. They helped because they could not stop themselves helping. It was the natural, instinctive, quite uncalculating reaction of the loving heart. On the other hand, the whole attitude of those who failed to help was: *“if only we had known it was you we would gladly have helped – but we thought it was only some common nobody who was not worth helping”*.

The help which wins the approval of God is the help which is given for nothing but the sake of helping. Jesus confronts us with the amazing truth that all such help which is given is given to himself, and all such help which is withheld is withheld from himself. If we wish to delight a parent's heart, one of the best ways of doing so is to help their child. God is our Father – and the way to delight the heart of God is to help His children – who are our fellow sisters and brothers.