

THE KINGDOM OF TRUTH

Daniel 7. 9-10, 13-14

Revelation 1. 4b-8

John 18. 33-37

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

When Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King, the year was 1925 and the world was facing rising totalitarian powers: communist, fascist, and socialist. In his encyclical *Quas primas*, the Pope made it clear that he was establishing the Feast of Christ the King to be celebrated on a Sunday, and not on a fixed calendar day, so that the greatest number of the faithful would be reminded of Christ's true kingship, a kingship that Christ bears, the Pope emphasised, not only as God but also as man; and a kingship that Christ exerts not only over individuals, but also over peoples and nations and indeed over princes and rulers. Christ's kingship is a universal kingship.

That was in 1925, about a decade after the rise of Lenin and still some years before Hitler's Final Solution.

In more recent times, popes (and particularly John Paul II) have deemphasised this hierarchical character of Christ's kingship. Rather than telling the kings and governors of this world that there is a universal king who is over them and whose name is Christ, more recent Roman Catholic teaching emphasises our Lord's solidarity with all human beings. Pope John Paul told rulers that they should respect the dignity of the people over whom they governed, because each one of those persons has the dignity of Christ himself. In effect, John Paul said to rulers not 'Christ is over you' but 'Christ is under you'.

In the face of this apparent inversion of Catholic teaching, one might ask, 'Well, is Christ a king or not?'

We sense from our passage in St John's gospel the anguish that Pontius Pilate had over this same question. Pilate probes and questions Jesus, and all he gets is ambiguity. 'My kingship is not of this world,' Christ says. So you aren't a king in the world? No, our Lord replies, 'My kingdom is not from here.' Where does it come from? Jesus says, '*You say* that I am a king.' Pilate leaves the scene without getting a straight answer.

Pilate would have known how to treat Christ if he were a king among other kings. If our Lord were a king who was supposed to be under Rome's rule, and if he had got out of line, then he would have to be corrected. Or if he were a king who had challenged Rome, he would have to be conquered. Or he were a king who had an earthly kingdom that was beyond Rome's geographical rule, then Pilate would have let him be. Pilate could have handled any of these situations, because they would have shown that Jesus's kingship was somehow on the same page as other kingships.

But such is not the case. Christ is not a king whom we can put alongside other kings. Our Lord does not fit in with any line of worldly rulers, nor within some sort of earthly hierarchy.

Yet he is called the King of kings, and at the final judgement it is he who will judge nations and rulers. Theresa May, Donald Trump, Emmanuel Macron, Gavin St Pier, Pontius Pilate, just to mention a few names; every one of them will be judged by him.

Well then, if Jesus's kingship is not political in the ordinary sense, is it spiritual?

That, too, would have made life easier for Pilate. Christ's kingship then would not be worldly; it would be just something in the heart. Pope John Paul in fact talked this way about our Lord's kingly rule: he said that it was 'self-governance for the

sake of service'. Jesus, the pope said, ruled himself perfectly so that he was able to offer perfect service to others.

And there is some truth here, for just as Christ is the King of kings, so is he the servant of all. But our Lord is not only a servant, and his kingship cannot be understood as merely spiritual. Think of that last thing that Jesus says to Pilate in our passage, that very unsettling thing. '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.' Here is a hint of the new kingdom that Christ inaugurates. It is the kingdom of truth; and our Lord, even as he speaks to Pilate, is drawing the citizens of that kingdom to himself. When our Lord takes over the human heart, he draws his people out from underneath all existing powers. It is a hint, and it could be a threat to Pilate; and Pilate is rightly disturbed.

Pilate did not understand Jesus's kingly authority. Nor did the popes of the last century, despite their bold and courageous writings in resistance of tyranny. No pope has been able to articulate the full dimensions of Christ's kingship. Nor can I. And this is the problem that we face: we, alongside Pontius Pilate, Pope Pius XI and Pope John Paul II. The problem is that the kingship of our Lord goes beyond all attempts to grasp it. We can see that Jesus isn't just another king. And yet we know that somehow he rules over everything, including nations, cities and governments of all kinds. We can also see that Christ wants to rule in our hearts. But that inner kingship is not limited to a private realm that is strictly separated from the public world.

The kingship of our Lord goes beyond all our attempts to define it, because he really does rule over all things. This then is the task: to let Jesus rule over all things. Our Lord *really is* the lord of our finances, of our capital, of our savings, of our property and of our spending. He *really is* the Lord of our bodies, of the food we eat, of the

sleep we take and of our sexuality. He *really is* the lord of our friendships, of our families. He is also Lord over us as a citizens and residents of Guernsey. You see where I am going; I am trying here to make a list of those things over which Jesus's kingship extends, and it is impossible to do! For the list would have to be infinite, because there is nothing outside of his rule. Christians are to rejoice in Christ's rule and to submit to it, to plunge into it, to participate in its extension through all things; to rejoice in it, to submit to it, to participate in it, again and again; for it is never finished. There is always more of our life to turn over.

We never finish submitting and turning things over to our Lord's rule. Today, on the Feast of Christ the King, may we submit to him afresh, and with joy.

Amen.