

## 34th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A

### Christ the King

Today we celebrate the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Next Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent and we begin a new year by preparing once again for the great feast of the Incarnation: the feast of Christmas. We dedicate this Sunday to Christ the King. The title is somewhat dated: for many of us kings and queens belong to a past era. However, the reality that we are recalling is that expressed in the 'Our Father' when we pray: 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'(Matthew 6:10). We are reminded that God is love and that we are made in the image and likeness of God. We are made by love and we are made for love. Our most profound longing is for communion in love, and today we recall the powerful presence of Jesus' love in our world. We are invited to open our heart to this love and our mission as a Church is to do all we can to ensure the reign of Jesus' love by committing ourselves to the wonderful mission of building a 'civilisation of love' on earth.

The First Reading is from the prophet Ezekiel, who has lived through the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon. He is convinced that, though the political and religious leaders of his day had failed the people, God himself would seek out his lost sheep and take them home. This theme is picked up in the Responsorial Psalm. Yes, we go through dark valleys, but the Good Shepherd is there, leading us to pasture. We have to keep moving. Life keeps unfolding before us and the terrain is not without its dangers, but God sends with us his goodness and his faithful love as escorts. He will never leave us.

The Church is inviting us to look back over the past year and to recall the ways in which we have strayed and felt lost but have experienced the guiding hand and the love of God leading us into ever closer communion with him. We are being called to a deeper faith. The Australian lyric poet, James McAuley, remembers how God has sought him out. He gives expression to his determination not to let go of the one who loves him. In his poem 'In a late hour' he writes:

'Though everyone desert you my faith shall not grow less,  
but keep that single virtue of simple thankfulness.  
Pursuit had closed around me, terrors had pressed me low;  
you sought me and you found me, and I will not let you go.  
The hearts of men grow colder, the final things draw near.  
Forms vanish, kingdoms moulder, the antirealm is here  
whose order is derangement: close-driven, yet alone,  
men reach the last estrangement, the sense of nature gone.  
Though the stars run distracted, and from wounds deep rancours flow,  
while the mystery is enacted I will not let you go.'

In today's Second Reading we are encouraged to look ahead to the final goal of our life. One more stage of our religious journey has come to an end. Whatever our age we are one step closer to that for which we are created. Paul reminds us that we are made by love and for love and that it is God's will that everyone enjoy full communion in love with him and so with each other and the whole of the created universe. God's longing is to be all in all. In the final analysis nothing else matters. As John of the Cross reminds us: 'In the evening of our life we will be judged on our love'.

The Church invites us to take our bearings. We experience many disappointments in love. Jesus had to bear the pain of Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial and of being left alone in his passion. But he showed us that no one can stop us loving. We can continue to love even in terrible circumstances. Jesus demonstrated that and gave us a share in his Spirit, his love-communion with God to enable us to do what he did. We are invited to look at the quality of our loving. Is God's love taking over our hearts more and more each year?

The Gospel says it all. The parable focuses on the coming of the Son of Man, that is to say, the coming of the definitive presence of Jesus before each and every human being. As the Son of Man he identifies with each of us in the weakness of our human condition, and especially in the unjust oppression that we suffer because of the accidents and absurdities which we cannot avoid. He offers us a way to live in the midst of meaningless situations. He offers us the assurance of the presence of God's action, which can create meaning for us in any circumstance. How we respond to his invitation determines how our lives are ultimately going to be judged.

He is the Son of Man. He is also the Messiah-King who sits 'on the throne of his glory'. He is not only our model and representative; he is also our judge. Rather, we are judged according to our relationship to him. He knows the hearts of all. It is important to note that his judgment comes as a surprise: our own assessment of ourselves is not ultimately trustworthy.

The key is to do the will of God (see also Matthew 7:21; 12:50), a will expressed here in the simplest and most demanding terms. What matters is practical, real love that can be recognised as such by anyone: simple, but as demanding as was the ministry of Jesus. It is in these ways that we express our love for God and others (see Matthew 22:37-40). It is this love that is the fulfilling of the law and the prophets (see Matthew 5:17).

The fact that Jesus identifies with those who are oppressed leads us to see the oppressed through his eyes and with his heart. We are sometimes advised to 'see Jesus in others'. Perhaps it is better to 'see others in Jesus', lest our focus move from the person before us. To be a disciple of Jesus is to live Jesus' life. It is to have his mind and his heart. It is to identify where he identifies. It is to know and give expression to the compassion of one who is 'gentle and humble in heart'(see Matthew 11:29).

On this feast of Christ the king let us renew our baptismal commitment, when we were anointed priest, prophet and king - 'King' for we are to be instruments of Christ in bringing about the reign of God n the earth. Let us renew also our commitment as a parish community. It can be expressed in the words of the Jesuit, Father Teilhard de Chardin: 'Some day, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides and gravitation, We shall harness for God the energies of Love. And then, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire'.

We can have many projects in life and be ambitious for many things. We will not find a more worthy way of spending our lives than in harnessing for God the energies of love. This is what God wants. This is what we are made to do. All God's grace and the love and power of Jesus' Spirit are directed to this end. A wonderful resolution as we begin a new year in the Church's life would be to resolve to harness the love with which we have been graced, and to encourage others to give of their love to the community of Christ's body and so to the world.