

Thy Kingdom Come

At the end of 1992 the Queen described the year that had passed as her *annus horribilis* because of the breakdown of the marriage of the Prince of Wales and Princess Diana, the fire at Windsor Castle, the illness of Prince Philip and various other catastrophes that befell the royal family at that time. Now, it seems, every year is an *annus horribilis* for Her Majesty. The present one would seem to be no exception if the events of the past week are anything to go by. One has to ask, then, is this feast of Christ the King, in its apparent championing of monarchy, promoting an appropriate image of Christ to the world of today?

This feast of Christ the King was established by Pope Pius XI to mark the end of the Holy Year in 1925. This was a time when the dangerous ideologies of Marxism and fascism were on the rise and had filled the vacuum left by the toppling of many European monarchies as a result of the First World War. The Pope, still a monarch himself, sought to counteract and reverse the alarming rise of toxic political movements by establishing today's Feast of Christ the King, thus endorsing monarchy as the form of political governance to be championed by Christians. And, fair play to him, he was basing himself squarely on a strong tradition in scripture in favour of kingship in spite of the fact that God warned his people from the outset of the folly of appointing kings.

However, Jesus is conscious not only of his own royal lineage as descended from King David, but also of the fact that he has come to establish a Kingdom here on earth, the Kingdom of God. But this kingdom does not model itself on any human concept of kingship open to corruption, greed and the misuse of privilege and power, but on a very different set of values. God's kingdom, which begins in Jesus, is a Kingdom of Justice, Love and Peace where, in the vision of the prophet Isaiah, nation shall not lift up sword against nation and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Where

The wolf lives with the lamb,
the panther lies down with the kid,
calf and lion cub feed together with a little boy to lead them.
The cow and the bear make friends,
their young lie down together.
The lion eats straw like the ox.
The infant plays over the cobra's hole;
into the viper's lair the young child thrusts his hand.
They do no hurt, no harm, on all my holy mountain,
for the country is filled with the knowledge of God
as the waters swell the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

The Kingdom of God is utterly other than any human kingdom and in endorsing it it was Pius XI's intention not to champion any worldly idea of monarchy, but rather to remind humanity of that marvellous vision of Isaiah and how the human race and the whole of creation could be if it just reclaimed as its heritage the kingdom God came to build in Jesus. To remind us that we have only one true King and Leader, Jesus Christ, who came to establish the Kingdom of God in our midst. The values of this kingdom were preached and lived by Jesus in his earthly ministry and were plainly opposed to the false ideals being promoted by the ominous emerging earthly powers and dictatorships of the age.

When questioned by Pontius Pilate before his trial about the claim being made for him that he was the King of the Jews, Jesus replied: 'My kingdom is not of this world.' Indeed, his kingdom is the very antithesis of earthly kingdoms, and his leadership the complete opposite of earthly leadership. He demonstrates this to his disciples at the Last Supper when he kneels down to wash their feet, giving them an example to follow of humble, hands-on service of others which is in contrast to the way earthly leaders typically lord it over their subjects.

The Kingdom of God is not like kingdoms of this world. The kingdom of God is within. It is like a mustard seed: it begins in a very small way in the hearts of those who embrace Jesus and his teaching, and who, by the movement of his Spirit within, have opened their lives to him. From very small beginnings, it grows in each one of us as it is fed and shaped and takes its proper form through the spiritual nourishment of prayer, the Eucharist, the Word of God, good works, self-sacrifice, respect for life and the whole of creation and the community life of the Church. The kingdom begins in our hearts and as it grows it transforms us into the image of Christ so that, as a gathered community, the Church, we become the presence of Christ in the world. We are its leaven, hoping to raise it up by witnessing to the values of the Kingdom of God in a world that so badly needs them, but so often rejects and is hostile to them. We believe that it is by being transformed into the Kingdom of God that the kingdom of the world reaches its true and proper fulfilment and we Christians have a vital role to play in the building of God's Kingdom. This feast continues to testify to this fundamental tenet of our faith.

“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.