

34th Sunday (B)

25th November 2018

'King of Love on Calvary'

Dan 7: Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven. Ps 92: *The Lord is king with majesty enrobed.* Apoc 1: *to Him be glory & power for ever.*

Jn 19: *'Yes, I am a king ... and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.'*

In the wonderful crucifix of our church, which is unique — it was painted specially for this church in 1962 — is the image of St Catherine of Alexandria. We can understand the reason for St Augustine being present in the image (on Christ's left hand), but it might not be so obvious why we have St Catherine too. Well, it's because the only previous Catholic church in Hoddesdon, a small pilgrim chapel in the high street for those walking from London to Walsingham, was dedicated — just like the Slipper chapel outside Walsingham itself — to St Catherine of Alexandria, a very popular saint in the middle ages. She was martyred around 305AD, and honoured immediately as a saint. In fact, it's her feastday today (25th Nov).

Many of our Christian celebrations — like the feast of St Catherine — go back such a long way, hundreds of years. But let's not forget, the Church as well as being 'ever ancient' is also, 'ever new,' and so the Church has

new celebrations as well as old. The solemnity of Christ the King, which brings the 'Ordinary Sundays of the Year' to their close, is quite a new feast. Pope Pius XI instituted this feast less than a century ago, in 1925, with an encyclical letter to the whole Church. At the time, secularism was on the rise, and many Christians, even Catholics, were doubting Christ's authority, as well as the Church's, and even doubting Christ's existence. Pope Pius XI, and the rest of the Christian world, witnessed the rise of dictatorships in Europe, and saw Catholics being taken in by these earthly leaders. He hoped the institution of the feast would have various effects, such as ...

- that nations would see that the Church has the right to freedom, and immunity from the state (*Quas Primas*, 32);
- that leaders and nations would see that they are bound to give respect to Christ (*Quas Primas*, 31);
- and that the faithful would gain strength and courage from the celebration of the feast, as we are reminded that Christ must reign in our hearts, minds, wills, and bodies (*Quas Primas*, 33).

So this great feast reminds us of the absolute authority of Christ over all things: over the material universe, over all of

human dominion and history, and over our lives. And yet, despite His absolute kingship, He exercises that authority in a way that only the loving God can, as a humble servant of the Father's will. We learn so much about the kingship of Christ, don't we, as we listen to the dialogue between the Lord Jesus and Pontius Pilate. One is the divine King of Kings, and one is a rather brutal, but weak, Roman procurator; yet Pilate imagines he is the one with the power, when in fact he has very little. Our Lord submits to the human power that Pilate has over Him: the power to order even His crucifixion; and yet in this act of humble service, offering His life for all humanity, He models what it really means to be a king: to give His life in the service of His people.

When we think about what makes us be drawn to respect a person in leadership, be it a king or queen, a president or prime minister, it's principally, isn't it, the measure to which that person has given his or her life in service of the truth: to benefit humanity, to engage with the people, and not to live apart, aloof, or simply enjoying the

trappings of power. All of humanity can learn the very epitome of leadership and government from the Lord Jesus. Submitting Himself to Pilate and indeed to the entire burden of human sins, was not an act of weakness, but an act of supreme love.

As we come to the end of another Church year — as we weigh up our lives against the demands of Christ — let's be drawn in admiration of our divine king, Jesus the Lord. Whatever the past year has been like for us, He has our care and protection in His majestic heart. He is not a dim and distant God, but one who has fully entered into the trials of this life with us, so as to lift us out of them personally. So let's adore and praise Jesus with our hearts and minds, with our whole lives, for when we let Jesus truly be King of our hearts, then life is good, and eternal life is ours: *Jesus, You are Lord. You are risen from the dead and You are Lord. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus You are Lord, You are the Way.*