

34th Sunday (C)

24th November 2019

'King of Love on Calvary'

2Sam 5: *they anointed David king of Israel.*

Col 1: *all things to be reconciled through Him and for Him*

Lk 23: 35–43: *Jesus, remember me, when you come into Your kingdom.*

When I was on pilgrimage to Egypt recently — apart from the real highlight, which was to be able to visit and spend time with the living Catholic communities in that land, where they have suffered a good deal of oppression — it was also great to be able to see some of the antiquities for which Egypt is so famous. For example, to see the oldest and largest of the ‘Seven Wonders of the Ancient World,’ the Great Pyramid, built as the burial place for the Pharaoh Khufu in around 2500BC. This was 700yrs before Abraham lived, and 1,300yrs before Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt. The Great Pyramid stands almost intact, even after all these millennia: 2.5million giant stone blocks!

To see such an enormous monument to an earthly king, and to enter into his burial chamber right at the heart of the great pyramid, made me think of the comparison with the King of Kings whose feast we keep today at the culmination of the Church’s year: Jesus Christ. I’ve been in

his tomb, too, in Jerusalem: one can barely even turn round, it’s so small; and even the vast church of the Holy Sepulchre, built to enclose the sites of His crucifixion and resurrection, is tiny compared to the Great Pyramid. But Our Lord Jesus was not about show, drama, displays of power, wealth, or worldly greatness, was He? We know He was not. It’s the irony of the world, isn’t it, that great monuments dignify the achievements, or burial places, of earthly kings, and yet the Son of God, our King beyond all others, has in general left such a small earthly ‘footprint’?

Yet His message of His kingship is all the more eloquent than all other rulers of history, and Jesus truly rules in the hearts of billions of the human race who have lived in the past 2000 yrs — it is estimated that 13bn members of humanity have been Christians across the ages ... of whatever race or age, we look to Christ Jesus as the one whom we honour with loving allegiance.

His dying in such dreadful indignity on the Cross reserved for criminals, was made beautiful and powerful by His love and mercy: even in the ultimate moments of His

earthly life, His sovereignty of care for the human race shines through. He pleads forgiveness for those who have crucified Him; He grants to the apostle John, and all His followers the maternal care of His blessed mother; He manifests His death as sacrificial, an offering made willingly (“It is consummated”); and, as we heard just then in Luke’s Gospel, He offers to the last-minute repentant sinner a total forgiveness and a place in paradise. We sing, don’t we, in the beautiful hymn, “Hail Redeemer, King Divine,” the words in the chorus, “King of Love on Calvary,” and indeed this is the heart of Jesus’s Kingship, and His infinite care for us.

We are in the middle of an Election Campaign, and sometimes we may despair of there being any leader or party that really speaks for the values of the Kingdom of God: of respect for life, both born and unborn, even frail and elderly; of care for the marginalized, poor and vulnerable; of diligence with the economy whilst giving the majority the chance to live decently and care for their loved ones. We will never find paradise on earth, however, and

any and every kingdom and leader, however benevolent, only offers a partial glimpse of a real love for humanity. But in our divine King, Jesus Christ, we know we have the ruler whose love for His people is infinite, such that He laid down His life for us, and in His self-offering provides for us. Those final words — that poignant moment and powerful decrees — only serve to prove that the Lord Jesus is the only King to whom we should give ultimate honour. Of course it is right to respect earthly authorities, and to follow them to the extent that they do not go against the commands of God. But our following Christ is not limited by this concern: we can give our whole selves to membership of His Kingdom and know that we are never compromised: we are strengthened by His gifts, made whole by His forgiveness, given encouragement by His perfect example, and offered heaven by His grace. How blessed we are to know that there is truly a leader whose integrity is untouched, whose service of us is unparalleled, and whose love is unfailing. *“Praised be Jesus Christ our King: Lord of life, earth, sky & sea; King of love on Calvary!”*