

## SERMON FOR CHRIST THE KING 2020 at St Paul's Brighton

The feast of Christ the King was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius the eleventh.

His encyclical *Quas Primas* prescribes that the feast *would be celebrated in the whole world and that every year, on this very day, Christians are to renew the consecration of humankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

Pius XI could not possibly have foreseen that by the end of the twentieth century the observation of this feast would have been almost universal in the whole of western Christendom.

And what is even more remarkable is that it was officially adopted by the Church of England in its revised calendar.

Some of the more ultramontane Anglicans had, of course, adopted the feast in 1925.

This is all very well, of course, and an interesting bit of church history, but is the concept of kingship an appropriate one for the modern world?

Yes and no.

But it remains true that kingship – the vision of God as the benevolent ruler of the whole of creation – is prominent in our tradition.

And the concept of Jesus Christ as the King of the universe, by whom and in whom everything will be consummated at the end of time, is integral to our understanding of what it means to be Christian.

So what is it that makes us distinctive as a Christian community?

What is at its heart?

At the heart and centre of this community is God, the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all that is, whose love brought us into existence, and who calls us to move forward in a pilgrimage of love, towards our fulfilment in God's eternal kingdom.

Our energy as christian people needs to be directed towards living this pilgrimage ourselves and towards drawing others in to share it with us.

We don't do this because we just happen to have landed in a situation where there is the Church and we seem somehow to belong to it.

We do it because we believe that through his self-revelation in his Son Jesus God confronts us with the truth about himself and his relationship with us.

To speak about Jesus as a King is to say that he is everything to us, the one person in the whole of existence who matters most to us, who means more in the end than our families, friends and lovers.

To speak about him as a King is to remind ourselves that our loyalty lies there, and that our attachment to him, our membership **of** him is the starting point of all our other relationships, all our action.

So we are drawn not only to admit where our loyalty lies, but also to acknowledge that this Jesus has actually won a victory which is shared with us.

A victory which makes us, along with him, first-born from the dead.

For as he reigns from the cross, so we also are drawn into his new and eternal life.

His reign is not one of lordship over willing subjects, but rather of loving service to those he rules.

The sign of the King is not limitless power wielded without regard for its effect.

The sign of the King is the Master washing the feet of his disciples, the Saviour dying on the cross out of love, a witness to the truth about God.

I need hardly remind anyone here that the Church no longer has the place in people's consciousness that it had even ten years ago.

On the whole people seem to look elsewhere for meaning, or perhaps the whole quest for meaning to life has ceased for many.

If the Church is to survive and grow it has to do so on the basis of what it is in itself.

The Church of England can't, and it certainly doesn't deserve to survive merely because it has a place in the life of the nation.

A whole generation or more has grown up without any contact with the Church at all.

In one sense this is regrettable, but it does give us an opportunity and a challenge to present the christian faith to those who have no preconceptions about it.

Many of the people we come into contact with will only be encouraged to stay by the warmth of the community they find, and by the ability of the other members to introduce them to the basics of christian life.

We can do that only if we ourselves put our hope and trust in Jesus Christ and submit ourselves to his gentle, loving rule.

All of us.

Failure to do this will mean that those who come enquiring move on to search elsewhere.

This in its turn will often mean that they will come within the orbit of bodies whose methods of dealing with potential converts are far more unscrupulous than ours could ever be.

Our tendency seems always to run away from these issues, these challenges, and not to take seriously the Church as a body with growing edges.

It is easier, of course, to sit back and talk about consolidation than to face up to the difficult matter of mission.

Easier to erect fences around the Church and to allow in only the people who take our fancy or who fit the social strata we belong to.

But Jesus is the **universal** King.

Admitting that will mean turning over stones we'd rather were left alone.

There is plenty of energy in the Church.

No lack of it.

Does the fact that we use very little of it in reflecting on the meaning of our religion indicate that we believe all the answers are clear?

Does the fact that so little effort is put into mission mean that we don't really want to let just anybody in and address ourselves to the task of communicating with them about what it means to be a christian?

Does the fact that for many who would describe themselves as christians and more specifically as Anglicans worship has an extremely low priority mean that in the end God really has no place in their lives in any case?

If we are to talk about consolidation, or putting our own house in order, then worship, mission, intellectual struggle, and intelligence and an intelligible approach to our faith, all have an essential part to play in that exercise.

If we procrastinate, if we divert all our energy into other things, not only will the Church as we know it die with us, but the King we sing and protest means so much to us will be nothing more than a figure from the dim past, yet another heroic failure.

The kingship of Jesus is dynamic.

If we open our hearts to him, then his dynamism will supply us with the resources we need to do his work and to be his body in the world.

We could do much worse than to see as our aim what Pius XI pinpointed in 1925.

*Christians are to renew the consecration of humankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.*