

Thought for Day – Christ the King, Matthew 25.31-46

Today we focus on the end of the liturgical year, look backwards and prepare to look forwards to the new year and the beginning of Advent.

And what a year it has been, a year like no other. “Unprecedented times” has become the mantra, alongside “lockdown”, “firebreak” and “r-rate”.

I wonder how people felt during the unprecedented times of Jesus. Jesus sent as King, but not like any king anyone had ever seen before. A baby born into poverty, without a “silver spoon”. One who endured hate crime and exile as an infant, and torture and imprisonment as a young man. Condemned to death in his early thirties, despised and ridiculed, with even his own courtiers turning their backs on him. What kind of king do we call that? I would suggest the best kind.

The life and times of many kings are portrayed in the Bible. Many of them have things in common. They are rich, with slaves and large households. They are often cruel and seem to live to fight battles. The battles they fight are for more territory, more wealth, more wives, more power, more status. The word that binds them together is “more”.

Their kingdoms might have been difficult to live in depending on your status. Those with the ear of the king would feel most comfortable, the haves rather than the have nots, but what about those who could only stand by and watch in awe at the wealth and trappings of kingship.

Today’s Gospel reading begins in similar language, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory...then he will sit on his throne in his glory”... an image of power and majesty, conjuring up images of the Magi coming to adore him at his birth and going to the king’s palace by mistake, of the crowds lining the streets on Palm Sunday as he rides in triumph into Jerusalem. It doesn’t reflect what is coming next. Epstein’s *Majestas* in our Cathedral helps us combine that sense of kingship and pain, humility and death. And not simply that endured by our king, but endured by his subjects.

This Gospel reading goes on to affirm Jesus as the king of the poor, the hungry, the helpless. He stretches out his arms, his love and his sense of justice to those least wanted in Roman society, what we might call the “out-crowd”. But much more than that because the “out-crowd” suggests an established group of people, those who set themselves apart. Those to whom Jesus ministered didn’t choose to be different and outside of society, they were singled-out and shut out because they were different, not good enough, an embarrassment.

Now Jesus goes on to challenge his disciples and all in his kingdom, to separate them out between those who followed his example and those who did not, the sheep and the goats. Christ the king in judgement.

Jesus singles us out too and judges us on our faith and our works. A loving judgement but a very real one. As we reflect upon the past year can we truly say we fed, clothed and sheltered our king by doing it for someone else? Amen.

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