

Solemnity of Jesus Christ Universal King

Dear parishioners,

In this country we have a monarchy – much loved and deeply respected. People are fascinated by its history and also by how the Queen and royal family live their lives day to day. The popularity of The Crown and the weekly sales of *Hello!* prove the point. Hilary Mantell's success as an author suggests that the Tudor period too continues to fascinate. The monarch is sovereign of the country: Queen of England and the kingdoms/principalities united to it, hence UK. When the EEC was founded in 1957, three of the six original member states were ruled by a monarch. King Baudouin was King of the Belgians, i.e. of the people rather than the country, and this too has been the case of the French monarchs after the Revolution, Louis Philippe was *roi des français* and, lest we forget it, Napoleon before him had been Emperor of the French.

In the light of these musings, it is interesting to reflect that the Roman authorities in Jerusalem slyly acknowledged Jesus' royal status by placing an inscription above the cross on which they had him crucified: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Not King of Judea, not King of Palestine. So, one thousand one hundred years before the Belgians opted for a popular monarchy or before their French neighbours did the same, Jesus was cast as king of his people. And this is, in my view, the key to understanding what his kingly status meant to Jesus. Unlike David or Solomon, he was not king in Judea with Jerusalem as his capital and the seat of his earthly power. His power was not linked to territory, possessions or palaces. His kingdom after all, as he insisted with Pilate, was not of this world. Had it been, then his troops would have come to rescue him.

“The king of love my shepherd is” are the opening lines of one of the versions of Psalm 22 set to music, and it is that love which Jesus had for the whole of humanity, and that urgent sense of mission to proclaim the kingdom of God and its values, that distinguished him from earthly monarchs, even from the popular monarchs of the nineteenth century. His royal status highlights Jesus' uniqueness, it underlines the protective care he takes of all men and women of good will, and it highlights the fact that all of humanity comes directly within the orbit of his loving embrace. Jesus is king of the Jews, but of the English, the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh too. And of all people of good will, of all people who acknowledge his sovereignty. This Sunday we celebrate our belonging to the King and to all others who are subjects of his reign. He was certainly different: he was crowned with thorns.

Father Patrick