

## **Solemnity of Jesus Christ Universal King**

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

It is only since Vatican II and the liturgical reforms ushered in by the council that this feast of Christ the King is placed by the Church on the last Sunday of the liturgical year (it used to be on the last Sunday in October). It is much more fitting that it be the crowning moment of the liturgical cycle because it sums up so much of what we have been reflecting on week by week in that lengthy period which stretches from Pentecost through to Advent, Ordinary Time. We have been following in the footsteps of the earthly Jesus and seeing his ministry, teaching and the incidents of his earthly life which remained in the memory of his disciples through the eyes of the evangelist Matthew. Central to Jesus' teaching was the notion of the kingdom of God. He had come to inaugurate it, to preach about it and to guide people in living by its values.

We know that the notion of the kingdom of God was not immediately easy to understand. Perhaps because it was so difficult for people to grasp, in addition to its being uppermost in the earthly Jesus' mind, he resorted to parables to describe it. Precisely because of the terminology Jesus used in his preaching it is easy to appreciate that there were many who expected whatever future idealized society it was he taught them to long for it was going to be a monarchy. They could look back to the great days of their collective history when there was a monarchy in Israel. King David was a hero and role model to many of the Jews.

In more recent times before the Romans came they had very mixed experience of being ruled by Greek kings, so many had a nuanced view of monarchy and the blessings it brought. Even in Jesus' day, although Palestine was incorporated into the Roman Empire, the Galilee in which Jesus exercised his public ministry was ruled by Herod, a client king. And yet it was obvious to all those who listened to him that the kingdom of which Jesus spoke was nothing like the kingdoms of the past nor those of neighbouring countries. The parables were only partly helpful in clarifying what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. He confused his listeners by insisting that the kingdom was already here among them while claiming too that it was a reality yet to come. Justice and mercy would meet in the kingdom, the poor and the marginalised were going to be the first to be admitted, it was going to start small like the mustard seed yet when it matured it would have so many branches everyone would be accommodated. Judging by appearances, Jesus' mission ended in failure.

But perhaps Pontius Pilate was also given a cameo role as a prophet: he insisted that the inscription on the cross would identify him as *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. The kingdom entered a new epoch on the first Good Friday, the king who comes at the close of the age to judge the quick and the dead may be wearing a glorious crown, yet his body will still bear the wounds of his passion. Today's feast challenges us to allow that crucified and risen Jesus to reign as king in our hearts.

**Father Patrick**