

Christ the King

I watched a rather disturbing film last Monday night. It was the documentary made by Michael Moore, called Fahrenheit 11/9. He sets out to tell us why Donald Trump became President of the United States. But along the way he explores how easily an elected leader can become a dictator. It was a disturbing film because it explored how far the gap can be between what we hope for in elected political leadership and what the reality may be.

Today we are asked to think about a different kind of leadership, a non-elected leadership, the leadership of a king. There are many places in the Scriptures where we can pause and contemplate what kingship may mean. For a long time, the people of Israel resisted the idea of having a king reign over them. God was their shepherd and king. When Saul was anointed as their first king it seemed as if they were rejecting God's reign over them. But Saul and those who followed him were called to act in God's name in their care for God's people. Few kings did it well.

At the beginning of Matthew's gospel, we are reminded that Jesus came from a line of kings. He was a son of King David through the lineage of Joseph. When Herod heard that a new king of the Jews had been born, he was so afraid of being replaced that he massacred all the male

children of Jesus' age, hoping to destroy the new born king.

Throughout the gospels Jesus doesn't talk about himself as a king, but he talks a lot about the kingdom of God. He calls us to become part of that kingdom. Jesus tells many parables to help us to understand what this kingdom could be like. But it is always something a bit mysterious. When Jesus makes his final journey into Jerusalem the people cry out, "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord." Today in John's Gospel, in the conversation between Pilate and Jesus and between Pilate and the Jewish leaders we hear that Jesus is now being named as king.

Pilate asks the question of Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Before he answers that question Jesus challenges Pilate to see where that question came from. "Do you ask this of your own accord or have others spoken to you about me?" That a good question for us too isn't it. Do we really want to know who Jesus is for us? Is Jesus still the person that other people have told us about, or have we come to know him for ourselves? Do we still cling onto our parent's faith in Jesus or have we come to a deep personal relationship with him? Do we talk about Jesus, or do we talk with him?

We have been challenged a lot about this in recent times. The first of the markers or pathways that characterize a healthy, vibrant parish has been described as a prayerful community in which each member is called to a personal relationship with Jesus. When we were answering at Mass the Plenary Council question, “What do we think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”, many of us wrote something about that personal relationship with Jesus and what may be needed to deepen it.

Pilate admitted that he was not genuinely interested in who Jesus was. But Jesus reached out to him by explaining that his kingship had nothing to do with earthly power. “My kingdom does not belong to this world.” Jesus had come into the world to gather people into the kingdom of God by revealing the truth of who God was for them. The kingdom is present when people listen to Jesus. The kingdom is present when people allow God’s love for them to shape them into the people that God calls them to be. The kingdom is where God reigns in the hearts of people who live the truth that Jesus has revealed to them.

It is difficult to get our minds around all of that. Each day we try to listen to what Jesus calls us to be. We keep watching the way that Jesus lived his life so that we can learn from him. We listen for the truth that God has planted in our hearts about the best ways that we can show our love for others. We pray for the courage to

speak the truth in love. We keep trusting that God is with us as we go about our ordinary family life trying to do what we believe is best. We believe that we help make present the kingdom of God by the good that we do. But so much of God’s kingdom is hidden from our eyes. It will only be revealed when Jesus comes to claim his kingdom at the end of time.

I suppose that’s why we read from the Book of Daniel or the Book of Revelation as we did today. Those books give us a glimpse of the reality that we can only see with heavenly eyes. “I gazed into the visions of the night. And I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man. On him was conferred sovereignty, glory and kingship.” In our reading from the Book of Revelation we catch a glimpse of who we are in union with Jesus. “Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth. He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood, and has made us a line of kings, priests to serve His God and Father; to him be glory and power forever.”

The truth of who Jesus is and who we are in relationship with him can only be fully known in the future. But for now, we live out our relationship with Jesus in faith as best we can. We make Christ’s kingdom present by living out however we answered the Plenary Council question and being faithful to what we believe Jesus calls us to be.