

## **Christ the King**

This week we have been watching what has been happening in Bali, when the leaders of the 20 richest countries of the world have been meeting. Perhaps we have been looking hard at what kind of people those leaders are and whether we would want them to lead us and the fragile world in which we live.

The choice for who we want to be our leader is an important choice. That choice is not given to everybody. In our first reading today, we see that God had made known that he was on the side of David. He had already chosen him to be king of Israel. The people pleaded with David to accept that decision and then anointed him as their king to make that choice clear.

Jesus was of David's kingly line, but he did not speak about himself as a king. He came into Jerusalem for the last time riding on a donkey. He came in as king, but he did not claim any power or authority over people except what they were willing to give to him. People had to choose him to be their king just as people chose David.

In our gospel today we see that many refused to choose Jesus as their king. Luke makes the point that people were declaring whose side they were on. The religious leaders jeered at him, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God." The soldiers joined in

the abuse. But the general crowd did not. The choice for or against Jesus is acted out by those who were crucified with him. One of them taunted, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well." But the other criminal was able to recognise Jesus as a king. In an amazing way he was able to see this man hanging there beside him, without any sign of the power and authority that belonged to him as king, as the one that he could put his hope and trust in. You and I can ask for that kind of faith. It is a faith that allows us to see beyond what our eyes can see and to search for where God might be hiding.

The criminal hanging beside Jesus was open to a very profound change of heart, a change that needs happen for all of us if we are to acknowledge Jesus as our king. He admitted of his own sinfulness. "You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case, we deserved it: we are paying for what we did wrong." It is hard to imagine what crime could merit such a horrible punishment as hanging on a cross. But he also makes clear the innocence of Jesus. "But this man has done nothing wrong."

And then he humbly asks Jesus to remember him when he takes up his kingship. He doesn't ask for any favours, any positions of power, just to be remembered. But the idea of "remembering" in scripture is something rather

profound. To remember someone is to be present to that person and make that person present to us. When Jesus told his disciples to do what he had done at the last supper in memory of him, he was telling them that he would be truly present to them each time they spoke those sacred words over the bread and wine. He was telling them that they would be present to him, caught up in the very mystery of his dying and rising again.

The response that Jesus makes to the criminal beside him is one of compassion and love. It confirms what is central to our understanding of salvation. To be saved is to be in union with Jesus, to be in communion with God. Jesus was confirming that he would remember him. He would be present with him as he took possession of his kingdom. "Today you will be with me in paradise." The salvation that he was promising the criminal stands in sharp contrast with what those who were mocking Jesus were asking him to do. To be saved for them was to come down from the cross. To be saved for the criminal was to be with Jesus as he gave away his life in love on the cross.

The invitation that we are being given today is to take on the mind of the criminal who was hanging on the right of Jesus. We are invited to accept Jesus as our king as he did. We are invited to declare whose side we are on. If we can do that then we too will be invited to be with

Jesus. We are invited to be with the Lord in all that we do, in all that we are. We are invited to model our lives upon him and upon the way that he lived his life in love for others.

In a few moments the children who are about to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time will stand before us with their families. They will be asked if they are ready to commit themselves more fully to Jesus in these words, "Children are you ready to continue your journey of preparation for the Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation this week and for the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion in the coming year?"

And are you ready to claim for your own the life of Jesus that was shared with you when you were baptised?"

Today we are all invited to honour Jesus as our king by renewing our baptismal commitment when we were joined with him in an everlasting union. May the Lord strengthen that union today and help us to live it to the full.