

Christ the King – 2018

Pluralis majestatis is better known as the 'Royal we', famously, though perhaps apocryphally, made famous by Queen Victoria – 'We are not amused.' I read that Henry II is credited with using the 'royal we' first, referring to his connection with God, and the fact that he and God were acting in concert, quite a claim. It was also used by Margaret Thatcher – 'we are now a Grandmother.' It is not now widely used! When the Queen used the term in recent times she said 'we, and by that I mean the both of us', referring to Phillip the Prince Consort.

Today we are celebrating the feast of 'Christ the King' it is a feast that rounds off the Christian calendar and reminds us to whom it is that we owe allegiance. The feast was created to counter the rising tide of authoritarianism between the wars. The ideologies of fascism and communism would go on to create, in Hitler and Stalin, two of history's most notorious, monstrous leaders. Today is an opportunity for us to reaffirm this basis on which the feast was established. Strongman style of leadership is on the rise from East to West, and growing stronger. One writer put it: "Across the world – from Russia to China and from India to Egypt – macho leadership is back in fashion." Barak Obama said recently: '*The politics of fear and resentment ... is now on the move. It's on the move at a pace that would have seemed unimaginable just a few years ago. I am not being alarmist, I'm simply stating the facts. Look around – strongman politics are on the ascendant.*' Authoritarianism it seems is, to many, irresistible.

There is however no legitimacy for this in Christian theology. God is not a monarch, not in the way we understand monarchy and I don't just mean kings and queens! Just as there is only one monarch, (that's what the word means) there can only be one president...just in case the republicans among us feel that perhaps they have God on their side! There is one God yes but that God has been revealed to us in such a way that overturns our understanding of Kingship and monarchy.

When Pilate asks Jesus 'are you the king of the Jews,' Jesus responds enigmatically. Clearly the model of kingship that Pilate is envisaging is not what Jesus models. It is as if Jesus is saying 'use the word if you must, but remember that its content is utterly changed.' It is a kingship that cannot be defined by succession, territory or ethnicity, it cannot be fought over.

The Kingship of Jesus is defined by who he is and that is best put by the John the Divine at the beginning of the Book of Revelation that we heard this morning: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. In the opening of John's letter he describes this Kingship, not a monarchy, not strictly speaking, but a perfect unity, a communionarchy! How might we understand this?

This is a difficult question because the Trinity defies description. Perhaps it is easier if we consider the nature of the kingdom, rather than the king. When Pilate says to Jesus so you are king! Jesus responds: 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' This kingdom then is founded on truth. It is significant that the authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century were fundamentally built on mistruth. Today we speak in terms of truth decay, post-truth, or alternative facts, euphemisms for mistruth. Much is being said today about the rise of authoritarianism, it is the antithesis of the kingdom because it is ultimately not true. So Jesus tells Pilate call me a king if you wish but know that this kingship is about embodying the truth, this is my royal authority if you will. To which Pilate responds with that statement that reveals his lack of understanding and belonging. Our reading concluded, before this sentence but it is worth being reminded of those words. 'What is truth?'

When we understand or least meditate on the nature of God, the God in whose image we are made, we should understand that truth is to be found in our communion and that this is the nature of the kingdom of Jesus and his kingship, a kingship in which we all have a share. This should be reflected in our ethics and our politics. It is inevitable that we will have leaders among us, monarch and presidents leaders in the Church, in politics, in the military and in every sphere of life. But there is great danger in autocracy it is not of God and is not truth.

So the 'Royal we' is no longer used by monarchs or would be monarchs. But as we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King it is perhaps worth considering that *Pluralis majestatis* is not bad way for to consider the Kingship of Christ. He is not a monarch at all, not in the human sense and that is why at the end of many of our prayers we are at pains to state that he 'lives and *reigns* in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever!' Amen. This is the Truth!