

Homily Christ the King C 2022 Pangbourne

This is a lovely feast, and because of it, a lovely occasion for me to be with you, amid your parish priest and this community assembled. A parish priest is called to fidelity, and his best expression is gentle but ardent. Fr Alban is kind, as those of you will have found out, who have already gone to him. For your part, you do many things too, but in cooperation with him. May God reward and strengthen you.

This is unity as God gives it, unity visible in the world with the Church in it. God's message is ardent but gentle in its approach. Today's feast is known as 'Christ the King', but that isn't quite its focus. The full title says everything about relationships, our relationships, our relationship in God, but more importantly, his relationship with us. 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe'. The universe indicates all created order. All kings shall fall prostrate before him! He is Jesus and Christ; that is, only he can save us. Notice that Jesus, Saviour, is not only Lord and King of the Universe, but OUR Lord. That means, we share Our Lord with each other in our choices, in what we say, how we say it, and in what we do. Jesus is Our Lord. he isn't my personal possession, my project, my agenda. He is Lord of all in the household of faith. Jesus Christ is in this community, but not governed by it. Any attempt to fashion God in my image or according to my idea will only result in the production of an idol; and a graven idol, at that. Rather, he is with us, and we are with him.

These days, it seems more than ever, we walk by faith, and not by sight, since the future of the Church in N.Europe is far from certain. Pope St John Paul II, whose visit to our land made a deep impression on it, was prophetic in his message about the 'dimming of hope' when we see that things can't be as they were. Yet, what persists, including the structures reflecting what we can still afford, illustrate God at work in our time. In all things, you are blessed and fortunate to have a parish priest, consistent with the history of the good priests you have received over the years.

In the Synod: 'The Church in Europe', 'Ecclesia de Europa', on the brink of the millennium, which surprises me people aren't re-reading now, in the context of current synodality, its document was addressed: TO THE BISHOPS, MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CONSECRATED LIFE, AND ALL THE LAY FAITHFUL, ON JESUS CHRIST ALIVE IN HIS CHURCH, THE SOURCE OF HOPE FOR EUROPE.

It has everything to say about unity in the Church as unity in Christ. This is what St John Paul observed and it is good for us to hear his message consistent with us now: "In connection with the spread of individualism, we see an increased weakening of interpersonal solidarity: while charitable institutions continue to carry out praiseworthy work, one notes a decline in the sense of solidarity, with the result that many people, while not lacking material necessities, feel increasingly alone, left to themselves without structures of affection and support."

How can we imagine a Church without structures of affection and support? I find that challenging.

Indeed, Our Lord challenged this from the Cross. The tradition of the Nicodemus calls the 'Good Thief' Dismas. Dismas in Greek means 'sunset'. So as hope seems to sink from Dismas, Jesus is the Sun that rises. Yet, Dismas taught the Church something wonderful. It was a prayer we could all use when we feel 'without structures of affection and support', in any aspect of our lives: 'Remember me....'

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'Remember me....' Jesus replied to the Good Thief what he says to us when we call on him. 'Today, you will be with me in paradise', or 'I understand everything about you, and so much more! So, trust in me to be God and to do what only God can do.

From this source alone, we can summon the faith to build the Kingdom God wants, and in our midst: a kingdom of the seven attributes, by which God determines its contents: 'Truth and Life, Holiness and Grace' Justice, Love, and Peace'. When we do as Christ did, God is with us, working in and through us. The fourth century St Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the fourth century, and an ancient doctor of the Church full of hope, wrote something as pithy as encouraging: "Life is being with Christ, because where Christ is, there is also the Kingdom". Union in Christ is the purpose of our lives. Through the ministry of the Church at work in us, Christ shows he is King and Lord. He leads us by faith as revelation. When we cooperate, Christ similarly girds that revelation in us with the sacraments, instituted to make us holy. Our celebration of this feast also bids us look to the end of time, when Christ will come in the kingship of his glory. Faithful to his promises, if we have lived with him, we shall reign with him.