

## Fr Paul's Reflection : the Feast of Christ the King - Year A

The Feast of Christ the King marks the last week of the Church's year and brings the liturgical year to its close. The Church would have hopefully been starting to look to Advent as a time of new beginning but this year, it is all so different. Tier 4 in Scotland means that the restrictions are going to have a significant impact on our liturgical worship, when we would hope to have a new lease of life and start to prepare for the festive season. This year, the challenge is different and difficult. Christ the King asks us to reflect on the kingship of Christ; not necessarily on the pageantry of the pomp and ceremony of a royal court but also on the humility of the manger scene. The images of Christ's kingship can be seen in both. Sometimes, we may be tempted to go for the image that makes us feel more comfortable and less threatened. It can provide solace in a time of need, whether that need be physical, material or spiritual. Our needs during the ongoing pandemic are perhaps greater than they have been in past years. We are all conscious that many peoples' lives are weighed down by worry, perhaps wondering and asking how they might survive over the next couple of months. For them, and indeed for many others, Christ's kingship is seen in the cross of calvary. It is an opportunity to gaze on the mystery of God as we try to make sense of our wounded and fragile world at this time in history. We seem, in a strange way, to be able to bring together faith, history and story. Perhaps in a less conventional way, we try and make sense of our current situation, and how to deal with faith in the market place where we may feel, at times that we are encountering a culture of emptiness rather than a culture of life. Our engagement with culture is crucial. We can still find a space and voice where faith can be expressed. The great danger is that it is consigned to the bin of history because it has failed to engage with the "new normal".

As the fallout continues after the US presidential election and Great Britain is trying to put the finishing touches to a Brexit deal before the end of the year, here are we as St. Paul would say, "preaching a Crucified Christ" trying to live out our faith in a broken and wounded world. We may wonder if it is worth praying. Is a life of faith something for a previous generation? Our questions are natural because we want answers. The life of faith needs an energy which it might struggle to find today. The feast of Christ the King today is about the cross and the crib. What unites them is our capacity for prayer. None of us is going to be a doctor of the Church or become a great writer for 21<sup>st</sup> Century but we can be people of faith that will help and inspire others to gaze on the cross and the crib and see the glory of God revealed in the manger scene and the Cross of Calvary



These words of Thomas Merton, one of the great spiritual writers of 20<sup>th</sup> Century may help us to build a bridge of faith and prayer for ourselves and those around us:

“Real Christian living is stunted and frustrated if it remains content with the bare externals of worship and “saying prayers” and “going to church,” with fulfilling one’s external duties and merely being respectable. The real purpose of prayer (in the fully personal sense as well as in the Christian assembly) is the deepening of personal realisation of love, the awareness of God even if sometimes this awareness may amount to a negative factor, a seeming “absence.” The real purpose of meditation – or at least that which recommends itself as most relevant for modern man – of the exploration and discovery of new dimensions of freedom, illumination, and love, in deepening our awareness of our life in Christ.

But prayer and meditation have an important part to play in opening up new ways and new horizons. If our prayer is the expression of a deep and grace-inspired desire for newness of life – and not the mere blind attachment to what has always been familiar and “safe” – God will act in us and through us to renew the Church by preparing, in prayer, what we cannot yet imagine or understand. In this way our prayer and our faith today will be orientated towards the future which we ourselves may never see fully realised on earth.”

Thomas Merton, “**Essential Writings, Modern Spiritual Masters Series**”, page 86/87