

## Homily For the Solemnity of Christ the King 2019 (24/11/19)

In 1925 it was already obvious that all manner of political movements were active to try and overthrow traditional forms of government. After the First World War kings and emperors had been toppled and replaced. Communism had become the governing principle in Russia, and its ideas were spreading across Europe. In Germany the populist Nazism was already presenting itself as the only possible way to defeat communism. The various treaties that had closed the First World War had broken up old empires, and new states were born. It was clear that the old ways of ruling states were seriously under threat, but what would replace them?

In this context Pius XI could see that there was a danger, but also an opportunity. Many of the deposed kings and emperors had seen themselves as, in some way, Christian. Already it was clear that they were being replaced by ideas that ignored the truths of the Gospel, and acted as if God did not exist. And so it was that Pius XI introduced the annual feast of Christ the King. He hoped that rulers would see that they acted not in their own right with absolute power and authority, but as rulers allowed to govern in place of Christ. He even hoped, and this might seem very optimistic in the light of what was to follow, that:

*“Peace and harmony, too, will result; for with the spread and the universal extent of the kingdom of Christ men will become more and more conscious of the link that binds them together, and thus many conflicts will be either prevented entirely or at least their bitterness will be diminished.”*

If only that had been so. It was no coincidence that just a few years later the German Bishop Johannes Schmidt chose this feast to preach a blistering sermon in criticism of the Nazi party’s attempts to unseat Christ the Prince of Peace and replace him with the false gods of racism and nationalism. Christ the Prince of Peace leads us to harmony, to reality, to truth, and to freedom, because he invites all people to live by the same principles: racism, nationalism, and indeed any other –ism that is born from the minds of sinful men can only lead, admittedly in differing degrees, to conflict and to sterile or destructive tensions.

So what does this feast tell us today? I cannot help thinking that something of great importance lies here as we prepare for another public vote. It is so hard to make decisions about how to vote. Experience has taught us that politicians cannot always be trusted, and we are also well aware that we only hear about the things that the media choose to pass on to us. If we are wise we will also realise that we will tend to hear what we want to hear, and to believe what we want to believe. In some ways the hopes of Pope Pius XI already sound hopelessly old-fashioned. Which politicians, with just a few exceptions, would seriously consider themselves to be contingent rulers, governing on behalf of the Creator and Redeemer of all? Perhaps in a multicultural Britain that is now to ask too much. But it does not stop us from asking our potential masters, who of course are truly our servants, some searching questions. We might like to ask them ‘On what principle do you decide what is right and what is wrong? What guides you in your choices? Faced with difficult decisions, how do you arrive at a conclusion? Who are you trying to

please?’ These questions are, of course, veiled versions of ‘Who is your God?’ The answers might be interesting.

In the letter that initiated the annual feast of Christ the King, Pius XI quoted S. Augustine: "*A nation is happy when its citizens are happy. What else is a nation but a number of men living in concord?*" (Quas Primas n 18).

If we are trying to assess what politicians say to us in these coming weeks, we might use this as a touchstone to measure it by: *What else is a nation but a number of men living in concord?* Our nation (or, just to illustrate the point, perhaps we should say nations) seems hopelessly divided. We need politicians who are committed to uniting, not to dividing. Ideas that divide the country into different groups and set them against each other would fall woefully short of nation building. True leadership requires the ability to persuade widely differing people, with different ideas and different experiences, to work together and to travel together. That is the way to bring a variety of people to live in concord. Who is able to do that for us? Who can we trust to build a society in which all can share? Do our politicians explicitly or implicitly exclude anyone from the community that they want to build? It would be so easy to settle for peace, justice and prosperity for the ‘in’ group, so long as it includes us, but forget about others. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love and peace. Do our earthly leaders, or those who would lead us, seek these things, really seek them with all their hearts? Do they want these things for all, or just for a few? Do they want to exclude the sick, or the poor, or the undocumented, or the homeless, or the unborn? If they seek to exclude any of these parts of society, they are not trying to establish concord but division, trying to set the acceptable ones against the inconvenient or the unacceptable. They are perpetuating the oppression of the powerless by the powerful, and listening to those who speak loudest at the expense of those who have the quietest voice, or no voice at all.

What sort of a world, what sort of a society, do our politicians want to create? How does it measure up to the Kingdom in which Christ rules? With every succeeding vote, this seems a harder question to answer. We have difficult choices ahead of us, but we should not give our votes away lightly. The Kingdom in which Christ reigns is the perfect kingdom, the place where human beings can all find fulfilment. In our hearts we already live in such a kingdom, and in our daily lives we strive to live as first as citizens of the Kingdom of God, and only second as citizens of an earthly realm. Any earthly kingdom will be just a shadow of the ideal, but we cannot give up on the happy dream of bringing our nation closer to that ideal of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice love and peace for all, without exception.