

# The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for The Feast of Christ the King (Year C)  
20<sup>th</sup> November 2022

The old year is drawing to its close – the calendar year, yes, but even more so the church year, which ends in a few days time. As with every change of the year it is a time to take stock, and to ask how wisely we have used this time, and this feast is given to us to help us with this.

Every year it sets before us a vision of the Kingdom of God; it sets out for us the nature of eternity, and asks us how ready we are to live in that kingdom. If the goal of life on earth is to become more and more the sort of people who will feel at home living in heaven (as it is), then this feast sets in front of us a vision of what we are called to be, and invites us to measure ourselves against it.

In the preface of this Mass, seven marks of the kingdom are laid out for us. How ready are we to live in a kingdom like that? How are we doing at building that kingdom now? Are we already living as if those seven marks were our fundamental law?

The first of the seven is truth. Without truth there can be no kingdom of any sort, no community, no common life – if people cannot be trusted to tell each other the truth, they cannot build any sort of common life because the only person anyone will trust is themselves. Truth is fundamental to common life, and if we do not treasure it then our culture, our society, is doomed. What is my relationship with truth? Do I tell the truth? Do I expect other people to tell the truth – and do I insist on a culture of truthfulness in my place of work? Do I call out untruthfulness? Do I expect public figures to tell the truth, and do I insist that those who do not tell the truth cannot expect my support? A kingdom of truth.

The second mark of the kingdom for which we long is life. Do I see life as something to be treasured – every life, not just people like me, or people close to me, or people that I need? Unfairness, poverty, violence, all these are tools of death, not life; they condemn some people to shorter, sicker, less complete lives, and so they have no part in the kingdom. But a kingdom of life is about more than mere existence, it is about human thriving, about life lived to the full, life that is fulfilled and fulfilling, life that is, itself, life-giving. Is that what I expect for myself, seek for myself – or have I settled for something that is little more than existence. Do I not even expect a life that is fulfilled and fulfilling – or do I settle for the expectation that not every life can be the best life. It's a kingdom of life that we want, full life, fullest life for all.

The third mark is holiness. Holiness is not something that we leave to the few special ones, the people who have the time and the inclination to do that sort of thing. Holiness is for everyone – it is nothing more or less than wholeness, humanity. A holy person is just another name for a person leading a fully human life, being most perfectly what they were always meant to be. In his Pastoral Plan the Bishop challenges our parishes to become 'communities of saints' – that is, gatherings of people true to the vision of life lived to the full, people who embody and make real the kingdom we long for in eternity. There are many vocations problems in the Church: not

enough priests, not enough deacons, not enough religions – but the fundamental one is, not enough saints.

The fourth mark is grace. The kingdom of God is flooded with grace. Grace is the help that God gives us in becoming the people we were always meant to be. A kingdom of grace means a society in which people realise that they cannot be their true selves alone; they know that they need help from God, they look for that help, depend on it, value it, and do not want to lose it. They put themselves in all the places where that help is to be found (through liturgy, say, and the sacraments, through the scriptures, through fellowship with one another). A kingdom of grace is a culture where we know our need of God, seek his help, and treasure all that we receive.

The fifth mark of the kingdom is justice. No-one could seriously claim that the world we live in is a just one – or even that it really values justice. Each of us is very keen to have justice for ourselves, but when other people come crying to us for justice, if this might cost us something to give, then suddenly our commitment fades. The kingdom of God will be a place of justice, where everyone receives what they need. We will not enter that kingdom until we are converted to justice, and for many of us that is perhaps the hardest call of them all.

The sixth mark is love. A kingdom not built on love becomes a form of tyranny, a place where the most powerful enforce their will on the weak. A kingdom of love is based on gift, on generosity, and it turns its back on greed and power-seeking. Love looks to build up the thriving of others, their fulfilment and their happiness, and that is what brings joy to the heart of the one who loves. A kingdom of love is a kingdom in which my fulfilment is achieved principally in helping others find theirs.

The seventh, and final, mark is peace. We all want peace, the sense that all is well and nothing is precarious, nothing is at risk, nothing is in danger of being taken from us. Peace is not just an absence of violence, it is an overwhelming sense of wellbeing, that all is well. Our world, marred by sin, lacks peace as it always has. We cannot on our own make it peaceful, but we can be people of peace, people who treasure equilibrium in our lives, our families, our workplaces, our communities. How we long for peace.

Truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love and peace: these are the marks of the kingdom, and we are apprentice citizens. We are ready for the kingdom to the extent that we embody these seven characteristics. How has the year been? Have we grown in these seven areas, or slipped back? In the statement of our parish mission we say that we strive to follow, to grow and to serve. This is really another way of summing up those seven things that mark out the citizen of the kingdom, as the apprentice citizen will do all those things: follow, grow, serve. When we pray 'Thy Kingdom come' are we really ready for what we ask for?