

Christ the King (C)

- Today is the last Sunday in the Church's liturgical year, & the readings fix our attention on Jesus as lord & king of the whole of the created universe - **but** from a cross.
- If we look back over the great Empires of history, we remember successful military campaigns, & we think of nations that wielded power over peoples.
- Today, for the most part, we have relegated kings to the history books, & we think in terms of elected presidents & prime ministers, but the reality of military & economic domination over people is still much the same – all too often the rulers in the world are ruled by vested interests of the powerful who have little concern for people & especially the weakest members of society.
- It's so easy for us to fix our eyes on the evil that we see around us, & on the jarring cacophony of the strident & ugly forces that disturb our planet & disrupt our peace.
- We can't escape from this noisy world, & our hearts & minds can't pretend to be untouched by the ugliness that afflicts & oppresses people.
- Today, however, we are invited to look beyond evil of all kinds to contemplate the one who is beautiful & true & all-powerful & who reigns over all; to see Jesus as the one who rules over the whole of the universe.
- Our faith is that this will be manifestly so on the other side of death when human goodness will be vindicated by God, & evil eliminated.
- That's the meaning of our doctrines of heaven & hell.
- But our faith challenges us to remember that the kingdom of God - the kingdom of love & justice & peace - is already at work in our world, like yeast working its way through the dough.
- This is the kingdom which Jesus not only preached but brought about in the lives of those who followed him.
- God is love, & wherever love is working to heal & forgive & encourage & build peace, there we find the reign or the rule of God.
- The love-power of the risen Jesus is working wonders in every part of our world all the time.
- Today we celebrate that fact & praise God for the wonder of his love.
- Today's Gospel sets the scene: Jesus is dying on the cross - how can he be a powerful figure?
- He is a victim of injustice, & has no protection against the abuse hurled at him by the religious leaders, the soldiers & even of the criminal dying beside him.
- Yet the most powerful figure in the crucifixion scene isn't Pilate, or the high priest or the soldier in charge of those carrying out the crucifixion; the most powerful figure is Jesus, & one of the criminals sees this clearly & asks to be with Jesus when he enters his kingdom.

- And in response, the crucified Jesus, unable to reach out to the man dying beside him, turns to him & says with love: *'Today you will be with me in paradise'*.
- When we think of leadership, we are inclined to think first of those who are in charge - who have power to make decisions & to enforce them.
- Today's Gospel reminds us that the only real power in our world is the power of love. It is Jesus who is the free person.
- It is Jesus who is the king of God's kingdom of love.
- Organisational leadership & decision-making in the community are important issues & so we need to do all we can to ensure that those who are discerned to have the gifts necessary are appointed to those positions of leadership.
- But the most important grounding for leadership has its basis in love – love of people.
- The love that flows from Jesus on the cross continues to reveal the power of God & to overcome the evil that comes from the abuse of power.
- We will bring about good change only in proportion to our love, because love is what God is, & love ultimately has true power.
- We might want a God who controls the world & who exercises control by wiping out those who do evil & setting everything right, but God is not like that.
- We have a God who respects our freedom, & so a God who suffers the evil that we perpetrate, even to sharing the oppression on a cross.
- The God revealed by Jesus is not powerless when confronted by evil & chaos, but the power he brings to bear is the power of love, not the power we associate with organisational leadership that can over-ride others & get its own way - God loves us & respects us & attracts us to good, & he does so in a way that will never ever be conquered by evil.
- Love continues to outwit hate in our world; Love continues to suffer through to the truth; Love continues to create life & to forgive & to nurture.
- What a tragedy it would have been if the good thief had been so obsessed with the abuse of the system responsible for putting him on the cross that he had failed to look upon Jesus & listen to the words of love which he spoke.
- The feast of Christ the king has implications for every aspect of our lives.
- Its main message, however, is of the power of love in any & every circumstance of life.
- As we struggle for truth & for justice, let us learn from him to use only the weapons of love, because it is with love that God conquered chaos, & it is with love that Jesus continues to conquer & change the human heart.
- *'Take courage', he said, 'I have overcome the world'*.