

ACCEPTING JESUS AS OUR KING

Some years ago an American soldier was travelling on a bus in Sweden. He boasted to the man sitting next to him: 'America is the most democratic country in the world. Ordinary citizens can go to the White House and discuss things with the President.' 'That's nothing,' said the other passenger, 'in Sweden the King and the people travel on the same bus.' When the man got off the bus, the other passengers said to the American: 'You have just met our King, Gustav Adolf VI.'

There is some similarity between that type of King and Jesus Christ, our King. During his time on earth Jesus ran away when the crowd tried to make him their kind of king. And this is just what we would expect from someone who told his disciples not to be lord and master over others. This is just what we would expect from someone who put a child in the centre of the circle as a model of vulnerability and openness to others. This is just what we would expect of a king who showed his authority by washing his followers' feet, and who was never so powerful as when he hung powerless on the cross, and yet as we have just heard, was able to promise paradise to a repentant thief.

As it was for Jesus, so for us his followers! We are never so influential as when we do what Jesus did – never bossing others around, not trying to be someone special or someone different, but welcoming every other person as someone like ourselves, someone with needs and longings like ours, someone who bleeds and hurts like we do. In short, we are never so influential as when we welcome every other person into our lives as another self.

On that basis, let me draw your attention to this definition of a friend which I found on the door of the fridge in a priest's house: 'A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and still accepts you the way that you are now.' That's the kind of person that Jesus wants us to be, that's the kind of person who truly belongs to his kingdom, whether they know it or not.

More than any other leader in our lives, he is our Leader, one whom we honour and love, and one to whom we readily and gladly bend the knee and bow the head.

Was it not to bring in that new world that he called 'the kingdom of God' the very reason that he came among us? Isn't that too why he stays with us? Did he not come down to earth to change our hearts, to rid us of all evil and all sin? Did he not come among us to bring an end to all hostility, all wars and all terror? Did he not come to bring us and everyone else justice, joy, peace, health and wellbeing?

His kingship, then, is not like that of other kings and rulers. It is not about wealth and power. It is not about domination and control. It is not about military might, conquests, and national security. It is not about palaces, splendour and magnificence. His kingship is about truth and honesty. It's about goodness and generosity. It's about service and self-sacrifice. It's about justice and love. It is about mercy and care. Mercy and care for all people, but especially for those who are poor, broken-hearted, neglected or ignored!

So, do you and I really qualify as subjects of his kingdom? Do we belong to him or not? Do we call him 'Our Lord', and if we do, do we really mean it and live it?

Today our liturgical year is coming to an end. Next Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent, and the start of the Year A Cycle of Readings. Today, Jesus our King is inviting us to bring this year of the Church to an end by choosing him once again and forever as our Lord and Saviour, and recommitting ourselves to living his teachings, values, and example.

With the help of his amazing grace, are you and I ready and willing to renew our commitment to him during the rest of our prayer-time together today? Are we? Surely we are! Let's try to make that commitment, then, make it from the heart, make it for real, and make it for keeps!

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