

Homily: Feast of Christ the King. 22nd November 2020

1st: Ez 34:11-12.15-17; 2nd: 1 Cor 15:20-26.28; Gospel: Mt 25:31-46

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At a time of world pandemic, in the midst of lockdown, we try to understand today's feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

Pope Francis is worried that the world is on the brink of a serious crisis. "The Virus is only one part of it. We are living at a time of growing international tension, and democracy is weakening across the globe." Speaking in February he said "There is no alternative: we either build the future together or there will be no future."

Preaching in November 1980, 40 years ago, Canon Sydney Evans, Dean of King's College, London, and then Dean of Salisbury, said: "Never before has the entire human race been poised so precariously on the edge – of what? Disaster or new disclosure? Predictive analysts of the future base their doom-laden warnings on what they extrapolate from trends they discern in present time: relentless pressure of escalating population; shortages of food and energy; the frightening stockpile of thermonuclear destructiveness; the uncontrolled momentum of science and technology; political inertia; individual blindness. Great powers feed each other's fears. No national government is wholly in control of its affairs. Economically, politically, strategically, intelligent and dedicated men and women work at the problems but no way forward claims conviction. What the doom-writers can't identify, however, are those more hidden, counteravailing energies that are also and always at work in human society, changing attitudes, opening up new possibilities. **Things may fall apart, but the Centre of all centres does in fact hold.** Signals of hope shine less brightly, but we who profess and call ourselves Christians are by our faith, people of hope, pledged to seek always the counteravailing energies that make for creative solutions: pledged always to take our stand within those energies at the point where love and evil meet: pledged to stand with Christ, crucified and risen."

Which then reminds me of French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin, (d.1955) whose theory that everything in the universe, all history, spirals towards a final point of unification; the **‘Omega point of Christ’**.

At the Easter Vigil we consecrate the Paschal candle with these words: “Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. All time belongs to him and all the ages. To him be glory and power through every age and forever. Amen. By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ the Lord guard us and protect us. Amen.”

St Charbel Makhoul (d.1898) said in one of his homilies: ‘The whole universe moves around the mystery of the cross. Man believes that the universe revolves around him personally, but **the cross is the centre of the universe: therefore he who wants to be at the centre of the universe must be with the Crucified on the cross.**’

Cardinal Basil Hume (d.1999) in one of his ‘mystery’ books, **The mystery of the Cross** wrote; “The choice is between the mystery and the absurd. To embrace the mystery is to discover the real. The experience of suffering, and, very important, the experience of failure bring us face to face with mystery....Coming to us as unwelcome visitors, suffering and pain can, if handled well, turn out to be friends.’

St Charbel continued: “He who does not live the mystery of the cross cannot understand the mystery of the universe. Every human being has his own form and existence in space and time. He is like a piece of ice that someone tries to keep far from the fire so that it does not melt. What good is this piece of ice if it wants to preserve its form and being at all costs? If the ice does not melt, it will not be able to soak into the earth to water the land and to quench the thirst of human beings. Do not fear the fire that is capable of making you melt to transform you into life-giving water that irrigates the earth. May your love be like the water that penetrates everywhere, do not let it be like a rigid mass as you yourself have thought of it, a useless form.”

The message of today’s Feast of Christ the King is so simple, yet so direct. Are we ready to meet our king? The central tenet of the Christian faith is that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a human life and died a human death just as the rest of us, is truly Son of God, and so to be worshipped and adored as

God. This astounding faith, so unique to Christianity, is yet prepared for in the Old Testament, even if not stated explicitly. In the 1st reading from the prophet Ezekiel, God promises *himself* to be a shepherd for his people, since the priests and prophets of Ezekiel's time were so corrupt and ineffective: a future prophecy amply fulfilled by the coming of the Word made flesh, Jesus, the 'good shepherd.' No surprise then that the Psalm is the most famous '*The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*'

Having the full revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, we can now as Christians recite the old Psalm of David as a hymn to the Good Shepherd, who offers himself to us in Holy Communion and sends us his Spirit, the 'Comforter' or 'Strengthener' to give us the help we need to live our lives.

A first reading of our 2nd reading St Paul makes the mind quite dizzy, because it speaks of a future time which is so difficult for us to grasp 'down here on earth. But the great apostle is trying to make us understand that the world as a totality has a purpose – the union of all things with God through the offering by Christ of his own life to the Father. As the head of his body the Church, Christ now gives assurance to 'those who belong to him' come what may.

If that reading has left us in the high flights of mysticism and cosmic unity in the body of Christ, then the gospel will very much bring us down, if not to earth, at least to reality. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God; we should be prepared to die rather than give up this belief, since it is the whole basis of our spiritual life.

As St Athanasius wrote; if Jesus is not God, then we cannot ourselves become divine. But it is possible for us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and so thereby to be completely orthodox – and yet to lose the final spiritual battle; because we do not see Christ in our brothers and sisters, and act accordingly. The church leaves us with this final challenge at the end of the year.

Christ proclaimed his kingship when He stood before Pilate as a beaten and defeated man, but whose kingdom is not of this world. His friends had deserted him. Judas had betrayed him. Peter had denied him. Forsaken by all, he cast his complaint at the unheeding sky, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? He died as a failure. But in this, lay his triumph.

He is a king in his defeat. Christ's life is the standard for each Christian life. In spite of weakness and fear, we are called to re-live his life and die his death, and hereafter share his victory.

Every suffering Christian bears the cross of Christ as his contribution towards the redemption of the world. Let our hearts too be purified by repentance, penance, prayer fasting and good works; let them share in the Passion of our Lord – silent, attentive, helping, sacrificing with him and dying with him – in order to rise with him hereafter.

You too have your sorrow, your cross, your weakness. Do not let them embitter you. Do not ask to understand what God wishes to conceal from you still. Do not doubt his love. Say with a smile that what God does to you is well done. God is preparing his future.

Only what has been purified in suffering can be used by him tomorrow. God cleanses his tools, he is cleansing his church.

We are not able to publicly sing, but we can in heart and mind:

*Hail, Redeemer, King divine. Priest and lamb, the throne is thine,
King, whose reign shall never cease, Prince of everlasting peace.
Angels, saints and nations sing: 'Praise be Jesus Christ, our King;
Lord of life, earth, sky and sea, King of love on Calvary.'*

Patrick Brennan

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*This is our God, the Servant King, He calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to the Servant King.*

Graham Kendrick

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