

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Christus Rex

“Rex” is better than “king”, I feel. I don’t like the word “king” very much. It refers to a medieval idea to my mind. Kings sit around in vaulted chambers, unrolling scrolls with messages about battles between knights in armour. They dispose of the lives of their subjects, and know all about power, greed, and violence. Behind them lurk less respectable figures - warlords, political fixers and hired thugs. There’s a vague feeling of falseness, and of mistrust; after all, many kings claimed divine favour for their power over others, and sometimes this was a licence for tyranny. There is, of course, another model: Edward VII, a man whose life does not edify, and George V and VI, whose lives were honest and decent: all three of whom, however, reigned without ruling, and were ikons kept pure of the tang of real power.

Not an Earthly King

In a plain worldly sense Jesus is not a king, and told his contemporaries so. He sought no earthly power or influence, and ran away when they tried to give it him (John 6). Yet he speaks of the Kingdom, more accurately the *reign* of God, all through the first 3 Gospels, and in the 4th Gospel he is tried for his life, by Pontius Pilate, on the sole ground that he is claiming to be a King. Indeed his crucifixion charge is “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” - words which manage to crucify *all* Jewish hopes of royalty, grouping all Jews, as an occupied and defeated nation, around the one they have handed over as a threat to Caesar. This death is the end of Jesus as an earthly king, an end he would not contest.

Not a Constitutional Monarch

But he isn’t a King like our “Royals”. A modern king is meant to make polite speeches about the values we all hold, saying what everyone decent would say, expressing national feelings. This isn’t what Jesus is about either. He may be that for many people, who keep his image on a dusty shelf, or behind the ancient covers of an antique Bible belonging to their grandparents. There may be lip-service to him, when people feebly claim that they are living in a Christian country, etc, etc. But that comes under the

heading of “those who say to me ‘Lord, Lord’ *and do not do what I say*”. Jesus is not interested in that allegiance. He does not reign by consent, but by divine right.

Universal Monarch

The reign of Jesus now is the reign of God he proclaimed to us in his lifetime: he rules with the power of his Father. The fate of the universe is in human hands: not because of the US Government or Glaxo Smith Klein or Bill Gates, but because the King of the universe is the one who died a human death and rose from the tomb. Death has no more dominion over him; and from that eternal place of power, he, a man, governs the universe with the authority of God. Nothing can wrest that power from him; the outcome of human history is therefore absolutely assured. However, we live our lives in a kind of micro-climate of freedom, where we can take real decisions and make real commitments: and none is more serious than the one we make for or against Jesus of Nazareth. For the time being, we can contemplate him, a man like ourselves, with a message for us which calls us to respond; we are *free*, for this short lifetime, to respond on our terms. Today’s feast reminds us that it will not always be so.

The Image Of The Trial

A free man can *respond to the law* on his own terms - obeying or disobeying - until he’s on trial. It is the same for all of us who live out this human life: we are free to shape it in any way, putting whatever we like into the first place. But in the end, there will be a judgment, for all of us. Then the veiled power which Christ now exercises will be decisively revealed, to answer the prayer we have so glibly made: *Thy Kingdom Come!* There will be those who recognise in Jesus Christ the truth they have always longed for, the fulness of life and happiness. There may be others who look on with nothing but fear, strangers who know nothing of the God who looks on them. We hope we shall arrive as his friends, and be welcomed with his kindly invitation, to inherit the Kingdom that has now arrived - no longer a matter of choice, but the final, glorious truth.
Fr Philip

