



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus, remember me when you
come into your kingdom.

Luke 23. 33-43

Christ the King

You might be forgiven at first glance at this Sunday's readings that the compilers of the lectionary (the series of readings set for each day) have made a mistake. As you might guess, towards the end of the gospel marks the end of Jesus' earthly life, and this reading is concerned with his crucifixion, and the 'conversation' he had with those crucified with him. Above Jesus' head was the snide inscription, 'Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews'. One robber taunted him to use his kingly powers to save both him and his companion as well as Jesus himself. The soldiers watching him challenged him to show he was a king by saving himself. Yet the penitent thief, quietly said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' – probably the first recorded death-bed conversion.

As the Church's year comes to a close, and we begin to prepare for the coming of the kingdom in Advent next week, we close the year with a celebration that in conquering death, Christ is King of all the universe, all things seen and unseen. Apart from the visit of the Magi, when one gift was of gold to show Christ's kingship, the only direct references in the gospel accounts of Jesus as king are at his trial and crucifixion. Ironically, Christ's earthly throne was the wood of the manger and also the wood of the cross – from both, a vulnerable God opens his arms in blessing and embrace to all who stand before him.

- What are your expectations of a King?
- Could Jesus have taken a short cut as Son of God?
- How does Christ's rule look to you today?
- Do you really want to subject to his 'just and gentle rule'?
- If Christ is King, where is his kingdom?

Christ reigns in the kingdom of God. Earthly kingdoms are defined by national boundaries, and have their own laws and customs. God's kingdom is 'not of this world' as Jesus replies to Pilate's question, 'So you are a king, then?' We might be tempted to think then that God's kingdom is something of the future, a time when all the baddies get the comeuppance, or perhaps putting it in more churchy language (that of the Creed), 'he will come judge the living and the dead'.

In Advent we look towards the coming of the kingdom of God, or rather its fulfilment, its completion. Before then we celebrate the kingship of Christ this Sunday, reminding ourselves of what is our primary purpose: to bring about the kingdom. Repeatedly Jesus states in his ministry that the kingdom of God is here, or it is very near.

- Is the kingdom of God, where Christ reigns, here and now or in the future?
- What are the hallmarks of this kingdom?
- How do we make real this kingdom in the here and now?
- In what ways can we show that Christ is king?
- Do you really want the kingdom to come?

Every time we say the Lord's Prayer, we pray, 'thy kingdom come'. What do we mean when we pray that? All of us who pray this prayer are committing ourselves – daily – to working for the kingdom. As we celebrate Christ the Universal King, we are challenged to consider our attitudes towards that kingdom, and how we can make it more real today. We have the confidence to do so, because in his death and resurrection, Christ has conquered death and earned the approbation of the reality of his kingship. As we sing in the Easter hymn, 'The strife is o'er, the battle won.'