

How do we celebrate the feast of Christ the King? The traditional 'Stir Up' Sunday has been replaced by this latest liturgical innovation. As I mentioned last year, it was introduced in November year 2000. I have expressed my reservation of having a feast day with such name because I believe in our liturgical calendar we already have a feast day in which we can conceive it to be the Christ the King. That is of course Ascension Day. The great Creeds inform us that Christ after resurrection ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of God the Father. St. Athanasius wittily puts it: Christ on the right hand of God the Father would mean God the Father is on the left. Christ is now ruling rather than God the Father. Whether one accepts Athanasius witty interpretation no-one should doubt the Creeds give a simple understanding that Christ is now ruling and judging as the King par excellence.

Hence by introducing a specific feast of Christ the King in our liturgy we would diminish the significance of Christ's Ascension. However, the important idea of Christ the King is sadly often and sometimes completely neglected in contemporary Church's teaching. This is perhaps largely due to the fact that fewer and fewer nations have a monarch and, if they have, continuous constitutional reform has rendered the monarch simply as a symbolic head. Monarchical functions are no longer significant. The latest example we witness is the Buddhist country of Thailand.

So be it as it is, let us explore the importance of what it means for us to understand Christ the King. Over 30 years ago, just as I arrived at Sydney, I made an enquiry why there was no celebration on Ascension Day in the theological college I was attending. The reply was quite shocking! "There is nothing to celebrate." It is simply like the full-stop of a sentence. We have celebrated Easter, it is the triumph over death and redemption completed. So why celebrate further moment of triumph? Has not Easter revealed the whole truth of the Gospel? I was challenged and even to the point of being rebuked sharply with such a seemingly excellent reply. So, over the years, I've been thinking hard on this issue. Then suddenly came the feast of Christ the King in November 2000. Naturally, those churches which do not celebrate Ascension would have nothing to do with it as well.

But it opens up my mind to a new dimension. Every Sunday we recite the great Christian Creeds, be it Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed. When it comes to the risen Christ ascended to His Father's Right hand, we are given the privilege to know the secrets of God. Something beyond this world has been given to us to grasp.

Let me explain further. Nobody would doubt the Gospel story indicates that Jesus wholly mediates the Kingdom in His personal being, and that the Kingdom has its origin in God's eternal purpose. This is how we should understand Paul's word in today's epistle reading: *'Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.'* (15.24) What it means is that the Kingdom fulfils all that God intended in Creation. Often we say with the coming of Christ, 'The Kingdom has appeared'. But let us not forget it has been waiting to appear. And, as with the Kingdom, so with Christ the King. Christ, too, has been in waiting. Christ has a pre-existence, not as a man but as the 'Son of God', the Kingdom itself, who came to be man, taking the form of a slave.

*'When he hands over the kingdom to God the Father'*, have you ever thought that you yourselves are in it? This is a universal moment! You are handed over to God the Father. Jesus Christ's appearance on earth is not a natural moment, like yours and mine, nor is His disappearance in Ascension. That is to say His every moment in His earthly life has universal implication. When Mary gave birth, that was not just Mary's flesh, it is our flesh. Jesus did not fight the temptations in the Judaeen wilderness; He fought them everywhere. The death He died was not under Pontius Pilate alone, but under every blow of mortality. The body that rose from the tomb was not merely the crucified body, but all our bodies. You may ask, 'how are we so certain of all these?' By what right do we claim a part in the Kingdom? Is it not by the right of the fact that God has exalted Him to His right hand, has made Him universal Lord, Lord of our temptations, our deaths and of our resurrections too. The book of Hebrews says, 'In putting everything in subjection under his feet, he left nothing outside his control.' (2.8)

From this final moment that Jesus sits on throne, the meaning of all that went before takes shape. His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, all lead to this universal rule which, one way or the other, counts us into it. This is the true meaning to celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

If we follow the traditional understanding of accepting Ascension as the moment Christ became the King of the universe, we have to concede no-one has seen His coronation, including Jesus' disciples. Acts tells us: at Mount Olives *'a cloud took him out of their sight'*. This is also perhaps the reason why so few churches celebrate the Ascension because as an event in human time and space it is quite indescribable. But that is where Christ the King should come in to assist us. Why do we want to grasp the Ascension? Because it would mean that we should behold the glory of the Son in the Father's presence, but this would mean we have gone into the definite future time of God's manifest judgment; no-one ever has been

given such privilege. What Christ has done on earth, including His coronation, has been all accomplished, and yet it is still an event for the future. That is where and why Christian hope so important! Our faith must be marked by a hope, though not a hope for our own private futures only but for the future of the world subject to God's reign.

So, Christ the King as manifested in the Ascension is the foundation which determines all future time. The enigma of Christ the King's absence in Mount Olives and the absolute certainty of His universal presence at the Parousia is resolved by St Luke in the book of Acts. These two contrasting moment is mediated by His 'presence in absence' at Pentecost. Now we know, not only the ultimate future, but the intermediate future of our time is governed from the moment of the Ascension. If we truly acclaim Christ the King, then He rules the time that lies between ourselves and His past time, the time which we ourselves now live and the time which is still future up to the point at which the Kingdom is truly proclaimed universally. Since the ultimate publicity of the Kingdom has not occurred, Christ the King is in one sense a secret foundation, but one which determines all public existence. It determines the ultimate and most truly public existence of all, when the contradiction between private and common is to be resolved and disorder overcome. But prior to this Christ the King determines the public existence of the church, which participates in the coming of the Kingdom and witnesses to it, and through the church it determines the provisional public life of the world. All worldly authorities will be subdued, reformed by Christ the King. We celebrate the feast not as individual but as the Church of Christ, to remind ourselves and the world that in Jesus Christ exalted and glorified the rule that has been forever God's is now mediated through the Church to people, society, community and even government and nations. This is the ultimate meaning of the Feast of Christ the King.

*'Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.'* One day we shall witness this truly ultimate and universal act of Christ the King.