

## 34th Sunday Christ the King homily

The Kingdom of Fife where I have just been staying, in the east of Scotland, roughly between Kircaldy and St. Andrews, does not really exist. Not as a kingdom anyway. No one knows why it is called a kingdom. It may have been an early Pictish kingdom, and early race of people living in what is now Scotland. It may have been a mistake with the name. But it has come to delineate an area of territory.

When King Charles is crowned next year there will be a list of places here and around the world for which he is head of state. But he will probably be best known as King of England here, Scotland above the border, or Great Britain/ United Kingdom. Again it is about territory.

But in the Middle Ages people did not see kings (or queens) as relating to territory so much as to people. People did not swear allegiance to a place but to a lord or a bishop or an earl, or to a king or queen. It was the person who was important. In a similar way priests in the Catholic Church (and may be others) swear obedience to a bishop and his successors, not to a place, a diocese.

Kings and Queens, even back to Pharaohs, also swore to protect the people that they ruled. So there was a relationship of a sort, even if more than a little one-sided in most cases. The king was simply more powerful.

It is more in this way that we have to understand the idea of Christ the King, and the idea of what Christ might be king of. It is not about territory. Heaven is not like the kingdom of Fife, from Kircaldy to St. Andrews (lovely as much of it is.) Heaven is not a place but where this relationship between Christ and his people comes about.

If we look at what The Good Thief says and Jesus answers; the Good Thief asks to enter Jesus' Kingdom, and Jesus says: 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' The essential thing here is 'with me.' That is what defines paradise, being in the presence of Christ, of God.

So we come to the end of the Church's year (before Advent begins a new year liturgically) and the Church is speaking of the goal of our spiritual journey. During the Church's year we pass through the stages of coming to know Jesus. Christmas marks the Incarnation and Jesus arriving on earth among us and our getting to know him, so it progresses through to Easter and his great act of salvation in his death and resurrection, and then Ordinary Time after that (Green time) where we learn what this is all to mean for us, and through the scriptures which we hear in Church Jesus is teaching us how to follow him. Then today we arrive at what it is to be successful. It is to be for all time, all eternity, in his presence to live with Jesus.

He is the one who swears to protect us, if we choose to bind ourselves to him. He is our Lord, as we often say in prayer, one we serve, but now one who loves us, not a lord who exploits us, but one who serves us too.

What The Good Thief simply shows in his request, that even after a clearly less than good life, all we have to do is truly, honestly desire to be with him. Simply say: 'Let me come into your kingdom, live with you, be in your presence.'

This is all our feast today expresses. Heaven is to be with Christ. As soon as we desire this, we enter into it and the journey to its completion.