

Kingship of Christ

On Tuesday Robert Mugabe eventually resigned as President of Zimbabwe. Like many other dictators he might have started out with a popular mandate but ended up as a king in all but name, determined to hang on until death. We see a similar phenomenon in North Korea with the growth of a dynasty that brooks no opposition.

For the Romans, a King was a ruler who had power, in fact the whole power of the state concentrated in his hands. When they abolished the monarchy in 510 BC, they were careful to divide power between two consuls, who would hold office for just one year at a time. Only in dire emergency was the whole power of the state entrusted to one man, a dictator appointed for six months. Julius Caesar broke the mould when he crossed the River Rubicon bringing his army into demilitarized zone of Italy. He compelled the Senate to appoint him dictator for life, but even he was afraid to take the title 'king'. He was content to use the military power, or *imperium*, entrusted to a general. 'Imperator' – Emperor – was a title given to a general who was successful in battle. He was dressed in the purple robe formerly worn by the kings, and a gold laurel wreath on his brow, but only for his welcome home.

For several centuries, the Roman Emperors maintained the fiction that they were just the first citizens in a republic. They did not adopt the outward trappings of monarchy until just before Constantine became Emperor, around 300 AD, but no one was in any doubt as to where power lay. Jesus tells Pilate, "*Mine is not a kingdom of this world.*" Pilate replies, "*So you are a king, then?*" Jesus responds, "*It is you who say it. Yes, I am a King. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.*"

Jesus is not concerned with the outward trappings of power. He is a Shepherd King after King David's model. He does not want to coerce us, but to win our hearts. In today's Gospel he explains how he will come in glory at the end of time. He will fulfil his final task as the Good Shepherd, sorting the sheep from the goats. The kind of reward that awaits us will depend on the choices we make here and now. Have we treated others with respect and love? Have we fed the hungry? Have we given a drink to the thirsty? Have we welcomed the stranger? Have we clothed the naked? Have we visited the sick and those in prison? If we have, this very response shows love in our hearts shown to Our Lord himself. If we want the world to become a better place we need to show how the values Christ teaches spell out what is for us to be truly human so that those who do not share our Faith can still see and accept their importance. Unless Christ reigns in our own hearts our words will ring hollow!

Today is Youth Sunday. In a very real sense our young people are the future of the Church. If the world is to be changed to be one based on justice, love and peace, then much of the responsibility for this will lie on their shoulders. This will happen only if they have the values, the vision and inspiration and the courage to work for it. The reign of Christ must begin in their hearts and ours. Young people are the future of our Church and world, but not just the future – they are already part of our community and have a role to play here and now, whether in the context of school or college, or our local community and parish. We pray for those who will be thinking about confirmation that they may feel truly part of the life of the Church.

The knowledge that they are not the only young people to know and follow Christ is very important in a world where secular values are taken for granted and a vision shaped by faith sidelined or ridiculed. We must be concerned not only for our Catholic young people but for every young person, especially those who do not have the support of Christian values at home or among their friends. We should also pray for those helping to foster and encourage young people whether through the Diocesan Youth Service or in our own local communities. *[I would ask you to pray for the work of CPYWT and TYPO in Coggeshall and Tiptree and our youth workers Jules and Stuart, for those supporting their work, and in a very specific way today for those seeking to find new funding streams to enable that work to continue.]*