

Lord God, through the power of your Holy Spirit, as we think about scripture, help us to enthrone Jesus Christ as King in our lives and the lives of this nation. Amen.

- How are you going to vote?
 - That made you all sit up! Is this going to be a party political broadcast on behalf of the Conservative party (or insert your own particular *bête noire* here)?
 - Before you all start reaching for your laptops to email the bishop, rest assured. I'm not going to tell you how to vote! Just to draw a few analogies, to think about what attributes a good ruler might have and to offer some guidelines about how to live in a world where leadership is not all that it might be.
- For today is the Feast day of Christ the King. The day when we contemplate Jesus, this extraordinary example of leadership, of sovereignty. Jesus who is *'the King of the Jews'*, hanging on a cross. Jesus, who was recognized as a king by the penitent thief, *'Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.'* Jesus, loved by God his Father, who calls him, *'his beloved Son'*.
- One of the problems today might be that Kings and Queens, and indeed Princes, seem slightly remote, very privileged, and often rather foolish. We are aware they often seem to make unwise decisions. They don't have much impact on our day to day lives. Indeed they often seem to live in a completely different universe.
 - Which is what more and more people today might say about God.
- Whereas Presidents, Premiers and Prime Ministers have a huge impact on the lives of the people who elected them, through taxation, through spending or austerity decisions, through their views of foreign powers and how we should relate to them, through how they support the weak and the vulnerable.
- Maybe instead of Christ the King, we should celebrate the feast of Christ the Prime Minister?
 - Before you dismiss this whimsy as pure folly, stay with me a minute longer. If Jesus were standing for election as leader of the Christian Church party, what would his manifesto look like and would you vote for him?
 - After all he was well known to consort with prostitutes and he had some very creative suggestions about what to do with tax. Let alone that fight he got into in the temple.
 - Would you want someone with such a frankly irresponsible attitude to money looking after your pension?
- So what are the attributes of Christ the Prime Minister, or Christ the King, that we can draw from this morning's readings?
- Humility. He put himself on a level with convicted thieves and with dignity shared their lack of dignity. A well-known president famously said about himself, 'I think I'm much more humble than you would understand.' Perhaps humility is best judged by its outworking rather than by a statement.
- Acceptance and forgiveness. The penitent thief was given hope when he spoke to Jesus as King. *'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'* Even to those who were the cause of his crucifixion he said, *'Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'*
 - That sounds like forgiveness for those who commit the most heinous crimes. Perhaps life does not mean life. There is always the chance of parole with Jesus.
 - But in this acceptance and forgiveness there is also the importance of recognizing who our King really is.
 - The first thief, hanging in desperate agony next to Jesus, seems to be regarding himself as King when he says to Jesus, *'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'* It's me first, and Jesus the King second.
- This seems to me to give the underlying message that Jesus, as crucified King, has a level of authority that allows him to accept and forgive and when we acknowledge his Kingship, it allows them to be real for us. Forgiveness is a state of mind as much as a physical reality.
 - The first thief may well have been forgiven by Jesus but he didn't know it, didn't want it, so it made no difference to his present state of mind.

- The second thief had his last hours on earth transformed as he felt the acceptance of Jesus flood over him. To what extent can any political leader have this sort of authority? Well probably not much. But do any of them, any of us, show any signs of trying to live by similar sorts of standards?
- Underneath this acceptance and forgiveness and quiet authority that Jesus brings to the cross is, of course, love. Who, without love, would allow himself to be treated in this way? If Jesus didn't care, he'd have proved his innocence whilst still talking to Pilate and ensured his release. Instead he kept silent, not something for which politicians are noted, and the love shines through.. By making himself the lowest of the low, a convicted criminal, unforgiven, mocked and naked, he shows the depths, or is it the heights, he is prepared to go to, to assure us that we are lovable, valuable and forgiven, and indeed part of his Kingdom.
 - Do Prime Ministers love their people? And how do they show it?
- Also underneath this acceptance and forgiveness is obedience. Jesus' obedience to his Father as God, and the willingness to follow his vocation wherever it may lead. Perhaps one of the problems with politics today is that the politicians see the electorate as ultimate gods, people to be satisfied, else otherwise their political lives will be removed. Maybe one of the guiding principles we need to return to is that we are not gods. Perhaps we are the first impenitent thief, making demands before we will form a relationship with Jesus, or indeed a prime minister. Perhaps those seeking a political mandate should spend less time trying to appear popular to the electorate and more trying to be obedient to the values of God. Would this make them easier to elect? I'm not sure. But it would be an interesting departure!
- A final attribute for Jesus the Prime Minister. Reverence for the created world. We heard last week just how important this is to all communities on our planet and the message comes out loud and clear today, not so much from the Gospel reading, although it is an unstated assumption here, but certainly from the first reading from Colossians. Evidence for this is littered throughout this incredible reading, but here is just one short extract to make the point, *'in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, ...'*. If Jesus was involved in creation, he must value it and call us to look after it and nurture it, rather than just use it as if we were gods and it is not important. What analogies can we draw for our electoral candidates?
- Faced with an increasingly personalised election race, one of our only alternatives is to see which leader best matches up to a vision of what we believe a good Prime Minister looks like. So what attributes of Christ the King do our candidates, either in this constituency or nationally, espouse most effectively, and which ones do they struggle with. How you decide may influence how you wish to vote!
 - I put it to you, that however you vote, you may not be fully satisfied with the result! For we are all fallen human beings living in a broken world. As Christians we are in the situation of living as foreign nationals on earth, whilst our true citizenship is as part of the Kingdom of God where the resurrected King Jesus reigns as Lord. We are subjects of the divine King. God has *'rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son'*.
- So if you want to live a contented life, here are a few one word guidelines from this morning's reading that help us cope with political kings who are not matching up to Christ the King.
 - Remember to look first to Jesus as King, the unlikely King on a cross, but also the one who holds all things together (Colossians 1, verse 17)
 - Be patient (Colossians 1, verse 11)
 - Remember to say thank you first before you do anything else (Colossians 1, verses 11 and 12)
 - Remember that although we vote, we are not gods. God is God and leaders are there for the good of the nation and the world and not to keep us happy. (Luke 23 verse 39, the first thief)
 - Instead, live as one forgiven and accepted. You may still feel as if you are being crucified, but you have a sure hope (Luke 23: verses 42 and 43, the second thief)
 - Be reconciled with others for Christ has *'reconciled to himself all things'* (Colossians 1, verse 20)
- And finally, whatever else you do or don't do, over the next few weeks, pray for all those standing for election that they may follow some of the principles that we have been talking about today. For prayer brings the Kingdom of Jesus one step nearer. Amen.