

Year C Proper 29

Luke 23:33-43

I would like to read you a brief account of a young girl's memories of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II way back in 1953.

"I was nine-years-old on coronation day, and sat in the Mall, with my mother and brother.

It rained a lot during the day, but the sun shone on the Queen of Tonga, wearing colourful robes, and our own Queen's golden coach.

My Dad was in the Abbey, conducting the choir, and so we have a programme and LP

records of the Coronation Service. A truly unforgettable day, full of colour and pageantry.”¹

It must have been wonderful to behold. And even if you weren't there you would be able to watch the event live on very grainy, black and white television pictures. For the first time the world could join in live with what for many would be a once in a life time experience. Our queen recently became the longest reigning monarch alive in the world and many of us will feel a sense of privilege

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/witness/june/2/newsid_2947000/2947912.stm

to have lived through at least a part of her remarkable reign.

Today is the final Sunday of the church year and as such it is known as the feast of Christ the King. We might expect therefore to be reading a splendid Gospel text, portraying Jesus exalted and enthroned, gazing down on the poor, suffering and violent world below. We're looking for Christ's coronation to draw out the themes of his kingdom. But no, we don't have any coronation, for this King suffers below. His majesty is not revealed from above but instead in the midst of the mess. Therefore it is entirely

appropriate that we must go to the cross to learn of Christ the King.

It is remarkable that this text in Luke's Gospel today reminds us so much of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples and is recorded in Luke 11: the prayer that we call "The Lord's Prayer" and I would like to draw out and make explicit two links between the two passages. First of all, we can begin at the end of our reading in Luke when Jesus said to the criminal who showed love to him, "today you will be with me in paradise". Paradise refers to a place of rest not to an ultimate destination. Heaven is not in view

here but instead a rest from turmoil. But it's the word 'today' that jumps out for me. "Give us this day, today, our daily bread", Jesus prayed. When we celebrate Christ the King we are emphatically declaring that he is king now, already. His coronation is not deferred. It would be a mistake to look around at the continuing mess of the world and to draw the conclusion that we are waiting for Christ to be made king; that pain and suffering and death are evidence that his work was not finished and so we must soldier on in the hope that he will win the final battle. The news today is that he has

already ascended to the right hand of the Father where he has been vindicated. It has been declared that he is the righteous one and so he has assumed his rightful place as the king of the universe. That has already happened. So today is not about a coronation but instead it is about the implications that his rule has on our lives and on this world: today, right now. “Give us today our daily bread. Today you will be with me in paradise.” Nothing is deferred, instead we live under the actual reign of Christ and therefore we are given liberty to ask the king for our daily provision,

remembering that paradise, the new Eden, is already enfolding before us. Even for us now on earth. What do we pray in the Lord's Prayer? "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" now in the present. We are not to settle for anything else because the suffering Jesus is Christ the king.

Secondly we cannot fail to miss the importance of forgiveness in Jesus' final moments. We pray in the Lord's prayer; "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". Jesus on the cross cried; "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" and then as the criminal on the

cross stood up for him he offered his forgiveness with the promise of paradise. We cannot downplay the significance of forgiveness in where we find ourselves today and we dare not spare forgiveness for others if we hope to find it shown to us.

There was once a very poor orphan who wanted nothing more in the world than to belong to a family. Finally, his opportunity came. He was eight years old and a family wanted to adopt him! Introductions were made, papers were signed, and just 6 days after his eighth birthday he left for his new home. He took with him his hope and his

possessions – the old worn and torn clothes he was wearing and a single soft toy. His new parents were excited to have him with them, and wanted him to feel like one of the family. A special celebration dinner was held, he was given his own room, and he was introduced to the other children in the street. His new parents took those old clothes, threw them away and bought him beautiful new clothes. They bought him a bike and more toys, and very soon he began to feel just like all the other kids in the neighbourhood, loved and part of a family. One thing however was curious. The young boy's old shoes, the ones

with the big holes in them, weren't tossed out with the rest of his clothes. His new father placed them on the mantelpiece. It wasn't long before the newly adopted son found out why. Every time that boy did something wrong his father would go and get those shoes and say "Look at all we've done for you. We took you in when you had nothing, but look at how you've behaved."

Forgiveness means throwing out the shoes as well as the clothes, refusing to dredge up the past and make it a reason for action in the present.

Alexander III was Tsar of Russia from 1881-1894. His rule was marked by repression, and in particular by persecution of the Jews. His wife, Maria Fedorovna, provided a stark contrast, being known for her generosity to those in need. On one occasion her husband had signed an order consigning a prisoner to life in exile. It read simply “Pardon impossible, to be sent to Siberia.” Maria changed that prisoners life by moving the comma in her husband’s order. She altered it to “Pardon, impossible to be sent to Siberia.”

Christ the King has thrown out the old shoes and moved the comma. Today, we too as subjects of the king must throw out the old shoes and move the comma.

Pope Pius XI instituted the feast of Christ the King in 1925. It was not long before Protestant churches began to celebrate it and it is now widely followed throughout the Christian world. At its inception while the encyclical that established the feast was addressed, to the Catholic Bishops, Pope Pius XI wanted the Feast to impact the laity. He said the following:

"The faithful, moreover, by meditating upon these truths, will gain much strength and courage, enabling them to form their lives after the true Christian ideal. If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and

precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice unto God." It is good for us on this last Sunday of the church year to bring the implications of the already begun reign of Christ before our attention. In this way we make ourselves ready to begin once again the story of God's breaking in of salvation into the world

through the coming of Christ. Hence, in the week to come we turn to face Advent and once again to light the candle that heralds his coming.