

CHRIST, THE KING.

25-11-18

A king with integrity.

Today's feast of Christ the King is a challenging one, for it asks us what the word 'King' really means to us, and therefore what the idea of Christ as King means to us.

When the word 'King' is mentioned some of us will think almost automatically about kings in a political context, like Prince Charles becoming King of England, which, in effect, means a mere figurehead, with no real power to rule the country.

Others will think of kings in terms of fairy tales, very rich and with absolute power, the kind who is quick to say "Off with his head", if people don't live up to expectations.

For others again it means a king like Elvis Presley, nicknamed the King because thousands adore his music, a crowd pleaser, but very limited, whose message has little of lasting value. How much real influence do any of these types have? How do they figure in your life?

Yet, influence is what we almost automatically connect with kingship, influence like that displayed by King Christian of Denmark, for example, during the 2nd World War. Denmark, like most countries in Europe was overrun by the Nazis. King Christian could have fled to England or Canada, or even nearby Sweden, like some of the other royalty of continental Europe did, but he decided to stay with his people, and to do what was in his power to carry the burden of Nazi oppression with them.

It wasn't long after the occupation began that the order went out that all the Jews in Denmark were to wear armbands with the yellow Star of David on them to identify them as Jews. King Christian did not think this was right, and so he declared that to him one Danish person was the same as the next one. So next morning he appeared in public wearing the black armband with the yellow Star of David, and let it be known that every loyal Dane should do the same. The next day in Copenhagen almost the entire population was walking around wearing Star of David armbands. As a result the Danes saved 90% of their Jewish population.

Later, when the Nazis decided that all 8000 Jews would be rounded up and sent to concentration camps, King Christian again reacted. He organised a resistance effort that smuggled 7,500 Jews across to Sweden in a two-week period. It goes without saying that he suffered

for his allegiance to principle, rather than to Hitler. He was imprisoned for two years and, after his release, when the Third Reich fell in 1945, he died a few years later from the ill effects of his treatment.

The story of King Christian's example of living by his principles, questions us about who or what it is that influences us? Who or what is it that directs us? What spiritual, psychological, moral or physical power has dominion over us?

It is a question that comes to the fore in today's Gospel reading as well. When Jesus is questioned by Pilate, he answers that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth. That was the principle he lived by, - to show and teach us in word and example how we are meant to live true lives, faithful to God, faithful to each other, and faithful to our best selves, as God created us to be.

By contrast, Pilate lived completely by what suited him, - by what best suited his own interest and survival. Even though he recognised that Jesus was innocent, he allowed himself to be swayed by other considerations, - avoiding a possible riot; a bad report to Caesar; fear of demotion, and so on, and since he doesn't want to risk any of these, he caves in, and tried to wash away his guilt by washing his hands.

What reigns over us? It is a fair question, for what reigns over us determines the kind of persons we are, and that, therefore, should be thought of as more important than what we do. What we do is a thing of the moment, but what kind of persons we are has a huge influence on how we approach things, and how we respond to the challenges as well as the routines of our daily lives. Is Christ really present there as our steersman, or are we rudderless, victim to whatever winds that blow.

On this feast of Christ the King, it is not enough to acknowledge Christ as simply Lord of all Creation. That's a cop-out. It leaves him like a distant figurehead with little influence on our life. What is asked of us is that we acknowledge him as the one who sets the standard for us; the one we trust, who will stand by us when we find things difficult; the one who strengthens us when we are put to the test, and our integrity needs bolstering. That's the King we are given in Christ, and nothing would please him more than to see his own integrity reflected in us. How strongly does his royal blood run in our veins.