

“King of love on Calvary.”

from the hymn, ‘Hail, Redeemer! King Divine!’

At this time of year especially – as the Church’s liturgical cycle draws to its close – our thoughts turn to the Kingship of Christ. The Council of Nicæa in the year AD 325 had clarified the Church’s understanding of the divine nature of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and described Him as ‘God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.’ We still use these phrases every Sunday in the words of the Creed when we profess our faith in Christ.

Sixteen hundred years later, in 1925, Pope Pius XI issued an Encyclical Letter called *Quas Primas*. In this letter, the Pope gave us a beautiful summary of the Church’s teaching on the divine nature of Christ and His kingship of both heaven and earth.

In the Creed, we profess our belief that Christ ‘ascended into heaven and is seated [on His throne] at the right hand of the Father, [from whence] He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and His kingdom will have no end.’ Clearly, Our Blessed Lord is King of heaven. There, He reigns supreme. In 1925 Pope Pius decreed that the feast of Christ the King should be observed on the last Sunday of October each year, that is, the Sunday immediately before the Feast of All Saints on 1st November. In this way, Christ would be seen to be reigning in all His heavenly glory with the full court of angels and saints gathered around Him, with His Queen, the Blessed Virgin Mary, standing on His right clothed in the gold of Ophir, as the Psalm tells us (Ps 44:10); and coming ahead of the Commemoration of the Holy Souls on 2nd November, Christ would be seen to the one who is come ‘to judge the living and the dead.’

This Kingship was given to Christ by God the Father, as Our Lord says twice in Matthew’s Gospel, ‘All things are delivered to me by my Father’ (Mt 11:27), and again, ‘All

power is given to me in heaven and in earth' (Mt 28:27). And this last point leads on to a central theme in Pope Pius' Encyclical Letter, namely that Christ is not King of heaven only: He is King of heaven *and earth*. Over the next couple of weeks we shall look at two or three different aspects of Christ's kingship, but today we begin by considering how Christ is – or should be – King of our hearts.

Nor is this mere sentiment. When Christ is truly King of our hearts it does not mean that we have a soft spot for Him or that we have a particular affection for Him in the way that a popular royal princess might be queen of our hearts. No! In Catholic theology, the heart is not the centre and source of feelings and affections. Rather, the heart is the symbol of our acts of the will. The heart is the source of our actions.

When we, as Catholics, say that Christ is the King of our hearts we mean that we have welcomed Him into our lives so that He may rule and govern our actions, our behaviour, our life of virtue, and our growth in holiness. Indeed, in the hymn, *Hail, Redeemer! King Divine!* we call upon Him to 'rule our hearts, our minds, our wills.' That is, we call upon Christ to govern every aspect of our lives so that our lives may be submitted to His sovereignty and ordered to His way of doing things instead of our own.

And there is nothing soft or sentimental about that because, in the words of the same hymn, He is 'King of love on Calvary.' It is from the Cross that He reigns. It is as the crucified One that He rules our minds, our hearts, our wills:

His throne is the Cross to which He is nailed;

His royal robe is His Precious Blood that covers His Body;

His crown is made of thorns;

His sceptre is the soldier's lance that pierced His side and wounded His heart.

This notion is so utterly at odds with the values and priorities of the world that singing the praises of a God-Man who is dying on a Cross is completely bewildering. Here, on Calvary,

when all is lost in blood and torment and pain, all, in fact, is won in compassion and consolation. Here on the Cross, where death destroys, life is victorious. Here in the wasteland of the crucifixion, where sin abounded, grace did more abound (Rom 5:20). Here, outside the city walls of Jerusalem where all has been cast aside as so much debris and detritus, souls are gloriously gathered in. The central paradox of our Catholic Faith is, to others, a stumbling block and utter folly (1 Cor 1:23).

However improbable the scene of crucifixion may seem as a place of redemption, sanctification, and salvation – and however at odds with the self-determining autonomy of this world’s philosophies the act of painful self-sacrifice to an invisible God may appear – we know it to be at the very heart of our Saviour’s love for us, and the central pillar of God’s plan to raise us up to a plane of beauty and holiness where ‘Christ the King of glory bright [will] be to us eternal light.’