

“It is you yourself who are my prize./ I keep the Lord ever in my sight.”

Ps 15:5,8

There is a particularly dirty word in the English language at the moment, a word you would not utter in polite society, a word which if you spoke your mother would tell you to go and wash your mouth out for using, a word which is so offensive that your insistence upon it could lose you your friends and your influence with others. That word is ‘duty.’

Just about the only socially acceptable use of the word today is in the phrase, ‘duty of care,’ when someone recognizes that he or she has a legal responsibility to comply with certain regulations. Yet doing one’s duty used to be considered a virtue, indeed one of the highest of all the virtues. Nowadays, many of us think it sounds too much as if I am being told what to do by someone else, and no one likes being told what to do, especially we priests! After all, isn’t the modern world supposed to be built upon my choices, my rights, and my entitlements?

Our English word ‘duty’ comes from the Old French word, ‘deu,’ which means ‘owed’ in the sense of someone being owed payment for services rendered. If we have a duty towards someone it means we owe him something. In the context of our series of sermons on Christ the King, this sense of duty becomes very important indeed.

Psalm 94 is said by every priest, and monk, and nun at the start of every single day, and by a growing number of lay people too. One of the lines in this Psalm reads:

*‘Come, let us adore and fall down,
and weep before the Lord that made us’*

(v.6).

And this is one of the reasons why this particular Psalm has been chosen by the Church as the opening prayer of the day. The Psalm is known as the *invitatory psalm* because it invites or summons us to worship the Lord our God at the start of each day. It reminds us that our first duty each morning is to turn to the God who made us and worship Him.

And this is the point: God is the maker of all things, including us. It is He who gives us all things, both material and spiritual. It is He who has redeemed us from a place of sin and death, who has raised us up to a participation in His life of grace, and who now leads us towards heaven so that we do not have to spend the whole of eternity exiled from Him in hell. In short, we owe Him everything. And what's more, it is our duty to give Him all that we *are* and all that we *have*, whilst reminding ourselves that the possessions of this life are merely on loan in any case, as the Prophet Job points out elsewhere, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return' (Job 1:21).

In other words, it is our duty to sing the praises of God, in the first instance simply because He is God, and in the second, as a way of saying thank-you for all that He has given to us and done for us.

Sometimes people will say that when they say their prayers they feel that they are just doing their duty rather than offering God the warmth of a heartfelt gift of self. But that is to forget that giving to someone what we owe him is the first duty of any of us, each and every day. It is our duty to give respect and courtesy to other people, to be polite to them and to assist them when called upon to do so. It is our duty as Christians to go beyond this basic duty and to give them a share in God's love through our attitude and behaviour towards them, especially when they are in need. And it is our duty, over and above this, to give to our Creator what we owe Him. And if we give to God each day everything that we owe Him, and especially if we also give to our neighbours all that we owe them, then in fact we are already saints, for that is what becoming a saint means, namely to conform ourselves, by the help of

God's grace, to a perfect likeness of Christ such that, like Our Lord – who emptied Himself of all the splendour and appurtenances of the divine (Phil 2:7) – we give to Almighty God and to our neighbour all that we are called upon by our Creator to give them. If we do our duty – and if we do *only* our duty – then we will have done no small thing! We will have fulfilled God's call to make Christ our King, and to welcome Him into our minds and our hearts as the ruler of our attitudes and our actions.

If you want a thought for the week, you could do worse than take the words from today's responsorial psalm which, if we truly take to heart, can help us to keep our eyes fixed on Christ as our King:

“It is you yourself who are my prize./ I keep the Lord ever in my sight.”