

St Marc Grenoble

Sunday 21st November 2021

Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14

Revelation 1: 4b - 8

John 18:33 - 37

'Christ the King'

PRAY

Good morning; it has been an exciting week for our church, with our Bishop's visit and 20 members of our congregation confirmed. So today's celebration is even more important.

In the Church calendar, today used to be called 'Sunday next before Advent' - the Sunday preparing for Advent; the time of preparation, prayer and penitence as we get ready for Christmas - The Birth of the King of Kings.

These days, it's called the Festival of Christ the King, which is much clearer.

Advent is the beginning of the Church's year – getting ready for Jesus' coming. It's good to be reminded that our faith is about the kingship of Jesus.

But His kingship is counter-cultural, different to the reign of any other king, or queen this world has known.

To understand the impact of today's readings, you need to use imagination. I want you to try and put some pictures, or visions, in your mind; that's appropriate, because the theme of 'Visions' runs through today's readings.

Picture in your mind, for a few moments, the most stunning church service you've ever been to, perhaps in a big church, or cathedral?

For me, it was when I was ordained deacon. The Cathedral was full of excited people; there was a beautiful choir and a long procession of people in all sorts of different robes and lovely music. It was breathtaking.

Now, let your mind wander over your own vision ... Why was it so special??
(Try and get some response).

Now, picture the scene, in our first reading from Daniel; He writes ...
Thrones were set in place and someone advanced in years sat down. His clothing was like white snow, the hair of his head like lamb's wool. His throne was flashes of flame, its rings a blazing flame. A river of flame was flowing, coming out from before him. A thousand thousands ministered to him, a myriad myriads stood in attendance before him. The court sat, and books were opened.

I looked in my night visions, and there, with the clouds in the heavens someone like a human being came. He reached the one advanced in years and they presented him before him. To him was given authority, honour and kingship; all peoples, nations and languages were to revere him. His authority is an authority that lasts permanently, that won't pass away, his kingship one that won't be destroyed.

Give space ...

What impression does this vision conjure up in your mind? Of course, it makes even our most stunning church service tame by comparison. Who was the 'Ancient of Days', or 'The Old One'?

We see a majestic, wise, awesome and everlasting God; who will ensure justice is done, forever. But, it's disturbing; because if I'm judged by my actions in life, and my own worth, the outlook for my future will be grim.

It is very important to understand that the picture is only a symbolic vision, because God is not simply an old man – with white hair; God is, more amazing and more splendid – more glorious than this word picture portrays.

Then, as the vision unfolds, in the second half of the Daniel reading: His dream continued: "I saw a human form, a son of man, arriving in a whirl of clouds. He came to The Old One and was presented to him.

He was given power to rule—all the glory of royalty. Everyone—race, colour, and creed—had to serve him. His rule would be forever, never ending. His kingly rule would never be replaced.

So, what do you pick up from that? ... This is a picture of everlasting power and majesty. We're not talking about a God who can be treated lightly or casually. This is a situation of gravity, of great awe, possibly even fear.

As we leave the scene – we have the impression of an ancient and majestic God, investing a great deal of power in a human looking person. Remembering this is a vision; who was this 'human looking form' or 'son of man' portraying? ...

There's a lot of debate about that; but, for me it's a vision of the Messiah. With hindsight, we see clear images of Jesus in Daniel's vision. It speaks about God's eternal plan, especially when you consider this part of the Book of Daniel was written at least a hundred and fifty, or possibly three hundred years, before the birth of Jesus.

This vision of kingly authority is a stark contrast to the picture of Jesus appearing before Pilate, which we heard in our Gospel reading, where Jesus is questioned by Pilate: (John 18:33-37)

Pilate says to Jesus, "Are you the 'King of the Jews'?" to which Jesus replied,

"Are you saying this on your own, or did others tell you this about me?"

Pilate said, "Do I look like a Jew? Your people and your high priests turned you over to me. What did you do?"

"My kingdom," said Jesus, "doesn't consist of what you see around you. If it did, my followers would fight so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. But I'm not that kind of king, not the world's kind of king."

Then Pilate said, "So, are you a king or not?" Jesus answered, "You tell me. Because I am King, I was born and entered the world so that I could witness to the truth. Everyone who cares for truth, who has any feeling for the truth, recognizes my voice."

Pilate is obsessed with knowing if Jesus is a king? Why?

Because, if Jesus claims to be a king; Pilate sees Him as a potential threat, who will have to be eliminated.

What amazes me most about this interview is Jesus' remarkable composure and dignity throughout the whole process.

There's no doubt Jesus made a deep impact on Pilate; without any need for threats or the slightest use of power.

Jesus knew what had to be done; He knew nothing could change what was being expected of Him; and, terrifying though the situation must have been, Jesus was prepared to trust His Heavenly Father – by whom all His power had been vested in Him.

Today is the day when we celebrate the Festival of 'Christ the King'; And, it's one of those days when we need all three appointed readings to give us the full picture.

Let me read the third one again for you, from Revelation 1: 4b – 8

Because I think it rounds off what I've been trying to highlight. John says:

"Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Jesus is indeed our King, with total heavenly and eternal power to free us from all our sins; and to bring us into the presence of our Glorious and Almighty Father.

Today is the day in the church's calendar, when we acclaim, celebrate and honour our Heavenly King; and give Him our praise and thanks, for the salvation He offers us.

And, as subjects in His Kingdom and His priests, it is our joyful task to praise and worship Him.

Further on in the Revelation Jesus gives us the best invitation in the world. He says: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

So, as I close, let's pray, and invite Him into our lives:

Gracious and loving Lord Jesus, thank you for offering each one of us the promise of your salvation, and the chance of your eternal presence in our lives. Come now Lord Jesus, enter our lives and transform us, we pray. **Amen**