

Homily, Christ the King – Year B 25th November 2018

Today we celebrate the feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe or The Feast of Christ the King. But reflecting on today's Gospel the question I ask myself is what does the Kingdom of God mean? When I was young people used to talk about the "Church Militant", at school we sang hymns like "We stand for God". A ten year old George would have told you that the Kingdom of God was a militant kingdom engaged in a huge struggle for its very existence with the forces of darkness, the devil himself, typified by Communist Russia and China. I can clearly remember on Good Friday TV stations often broadcast dramatizations of Christ's Crucifixion I remember feeling gutted that Christ had no army to save him. I questioned; how was this allowed to happen, where were our tanks and guns, where was the church militant? The Australia of my childhood had come very close to being invaded some fifteen years earlier, most people of my Dad's age had either been directly or indirectly involved in the fighting of World War 2. The security of our nation and our Church was seen in terms of the strength of our military might. If the other side thought they could

overwhelm us we were doomed. Peace, our very existence was only assured only by our military might, our adversaries had to believe that any attack on us would result in their destruction. A Cold War policy known as 'mutually assured destruction' or MAD, never was an acronym so true. The policy was indeed mad. Nevertheless it was an idea the permeated all levels of society. When I was bullied at school my parents reacted by sending me for boxing lessons. Force was always confronted with force; violence was always confronted with violence. Personally I believe that the problems of violence and abuse in our homes, in our workplaces even in our Church can be traced back to this period when might was seen as unquestionably right.

But is, might right? The questioning of Jesus by Pilate in today's Gospel confronts this question. In fact it describes a confrontation between two kingdoms. The earthly kingdom of the Roman Empire; the greatest military force the world has ever known, represented by Pilate and the heavenly kingdom the Kingdom of God, represented by the son of a carpenter Jesus, a Jew disowned and mocked by His own people. Pilate's Roman Empire was based on military might, violence

and oppression. Jesus's kingdom was based on unconditional love of God and neighbour. Unconditional love, a concept as incomprehensible today as it was in the time of Pilate. If I said to you that our national policies should be founded on unconditional love I would be told that we live in a real world with real dangers. But hatred can only flourish under oppression. Youths can only be radicalised when they feel marginalised or unwanted. The great lesson of the conflicts of the last century is that war and hatred flourish when people have no hope. It is often written by historians that the Second World War started with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles which ended the First World War. I'm not making excuses for the unspeakable horrors inflicted on millions of innocent people by the Nazi regime but the crippling terms of Treaty of Versailles gave the German people no hope and allowed hatred to flourish. It could be argued that the next generation of terrorist are currently languishing in the hopelessness of our off-shore detention centres.

If I embrace Christ the King, my kingdom is not of this world and never can be because the world can't comprehend the unconditional love of God. I want, I

even demand a God of vengeance and power. I want a God of justice but justice on my terms. Surely the despots of the world Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin etc. etc. are languishing in terrible pain for eternity in Hell. I struggle to comprehend a God that will confront these despots who have murdered countless millions with unconditional love. The question is; will they be able to return that unconditional love because if they are incapable of love they are doomed. You see the works of mercy Jesus refers to in Matthew 25 "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me" are all based on love, a love of Christ in the other a love that if not practiced and nurtured in this worldly life will render us incapable of love in eternity. I find the writings of the Cistercian Monk Thomas Merton chilling: If I have not lived an earthly life centred on love when I am confronted with the unconditional love of God I will be unable to love God back and thus condemn myself to an eternity in a Hell of our own making.

For me the great paradox of life is by living a life centred on love I am bringing God's Kingdom to earth and in doing so I'm preparing for life in the Kingdom of God in eternity. I doubt if the ten year old George would have understood that paradox but he did understand the security love can bring he had experienced that in his family. You see the boxing lessons were a failure, the bullying stopped but the fear remained, there would always be a bigger kid. Likewise our country has a state of the art military, but we are still afraid of China's ambitions, and almost comically we are still afraid of being invaded by frightened, helpless people arriving in leaking boats. Like that 10 year old George we need to learn that true security is not found in force but in love. What does the Kingdom of God mean? The answer is simple a place of unconditional love. Christ the King is the king of unconditional love. God's gift to the Universe is life and God's gift to us is the Universe, gifts given out of unconditional love. How will we respond with violence or love? I must choose carefully because how I spend eternity will depend upon my choice.