

062b – Christ the King

Our Shepherd-King

You may like to project the photos on the screen during the homily.

Some of you may have seen a film that came out in 2010 called 'The King's Speech'. It was popular at the time and is often re-run on TV and streaming services. It tells the story of King George VI, the father of Queen Elizabeth II and the grandfather of the present King, Charles III.

George VI was never meant to be king. His older brother, Edward VIII, was next in line but he abdicated to marry an American divorcee, Wallis Simpson. Suddenly George VI found the kingship thrust on him, something he didn't really want. By nature, he was a shy, reserved person, and he also had a speech impediment, which made public speaking very difficult for him.

There was a great deal of tension, for himself and others, on the first occasion he had to address the British parliament. Would he be able to get through his speech? Well, he did, and quite well. He had taken up the role of king and committed himself to it and, with help, managed to sufficiently overcome his impediment.

But he is best remembered, and loved, not for his speech impediment but for his role as king during World War II, when he refused to leave London during the blitzkrieg – the German bombing of London. The Prime Minister and others urged him to go to a safe hiding place in the country. But he refused. He believed his place was to be with the people most at risk, and all through the war he and his wife were seen each day among the people of London encouraging them. He died shortly after the war ended, at a relatively young age, worn out by the commitment he gave in the war years.





I mention him on this feast of Christ the King, I think he is a very good example of the shepherd-king that the Bible praises so greatly that we hear in today's readings, especially in the first reading and the responsorial psalm. In the image of the shepherd-king, we find two elements reconciled that are often in conflict, namely leader and companion.



The Shepherd King is firstly the leader, the protector of the flock – and he leads by going ahead and saying to the sheep ‘follow me’. As today’s psalm says so beautifully, ‘near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit.’

And the shepherd-king is also the companion of the sheep, the one who is with them in all circumstances. The shepherd is out in the fields with the sheep: if it is cold and raining, both the shepherd and the sheep are cold and wet.

As the bombs fell on London, the people were in grave danger, and so also was the king. As today's psalm expresses it: 'If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear, you are there with your crook and staff, with these you give me comfort.

All of this is summed up beautifully in the words of the shepherd in today's first reading: 'I am going to look after my flock and keep all of it in view. I shall rescue them. I shall pasture them, I will show them where to rest; I will look after the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded, and make the weak strong. [And then the line I like the best!], 'I shall watch over the fat and healthy.' That is Jesus, the shepherd-king, for each of us.

Today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus, our shepherd-king, is present among us in the most vulnerable members of our community – in the poor, the starving, the sick, and in the prisoners and strangers in our midst. We pay homage to him by paying homage to them. On this feast of Christ the King, let us take to heart his words to us: 'whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me.

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