



*Thirty fourth Week Ordinary Time*

*Our Lord Jesus Christ Universal King*

*2 Samuel 5:1-3 Colossians 1:12-20 Luke 23: 35-43*

At the end of the story of the feeding of the crowd at Passover in John's gospel there is a fragment which reads, "Jesus realised that they would come and carry him off to make him king, so he fled back to the mountain alone."

John describes Jesus as fearing public acclaim. The first reading from Samuel gives us a clue why this might be so. David, the shepherd King, is first of all a warrior. History tells us that Kingship was often associated with war, aggression, and conquest. It is always political. Many of the national and international rivalries are based on religious differences. The Bible tells that God was reluctant to allow his people a King.

God had a covenant with his people. By this treaty God is named as leader. To ask for a king was to alter the terms of the relationship. For Israel to have a king was to opt for the way of the world rather than God's way.

For the church to name Jesus Christ as King is to raise some very old issues about leadership.

The Gospel chosen for today is taken from the Passion story of Luke. It begins at the Cross. The people stood watching while the leaders mocked. In their mockery they use the title, Messiah. Luke emphasises the role of the leaders by having the thieves siding, one with the leaders, the other with the followers.

In the entry into Jerusalem we read, "the entire crowd of disciples began to rejoice and praise God loudly for the **display of power** they had seen."

The jeers at Calvary are about the lack of power shown by Jesus. Messiah implied the ability to use power to restore the fortunes of Israel. What use is a Messiah that cannot save himself? With sour wine and sour words the soldiers jeer, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

In establishing the feast of Jesus Christ King the church is asking us to reverse a symbol. To tamper with a symbol is to take the risk of a loss of meaning. If Jesus is King how do we read this?

Do we understand that Jesus offers a new model of leadership? Do we remember that pomp, glory, splendour and honours are shallow, less substantial than morning mist?

Today is a good day to reflect on leadership. For the last fifty years or more the concept of leadership has been undergoing a change. In homes, in business, in

communities, and in the church people are asking questions about the quality of leadership.

A concern for human dignity means that we are less comfortable with a leadership that is dictatorial, with decisions made without consultation, with decisions made “at a distance” from the persons and situations concerned.

The Gospels tell us about Jesus’ own model of leadership. Jesus inspired he did not coerce. Jesus made his mission his disciples’ mission. Jesus sent his followers out to use their own talents and skills in proclaiming the good news.

He taught them to reflect on their actions. He showed by example the value of prayer, of quiet times, of community support.

He knew them well enough to know their fears, hopes and petty squabbles. His trust and love healed and empowered. His anger flared against Peter’s presumption but not Judas’s betrayal.

There are many other insights to be gained. We need to reflect on them according to our circumstances.

If Jesus is King then it as head of the body not separate from the body. If Jesus is King then we share in his kingship through sharing in the redeeming love of God. To share this kingship is to know forgiveness and how to forgive. It is to unite and restore in peace.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.