

## **'Be Still and Know that I am God'.<sup>1</sup> Christ the King 2016**

May I speak in the name of the living God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Sometimes our paths cross individuals of great power. Power generated through the position they have acquired in life. A power that comes as the result of their own forcefulness and aggression. It might be a king, a queen or a powerful politician. A military commander or a very successful businessman. Such individuals can make us feel intimidated or weak in their presence. Sometimes their projection of power can make us feel powerless. This can promote strange reactions in us, we may cower or we may put up strong resistance in their presence. We may follow such individuals, but we do so out of fear or greed: fear that they may use their power against us if we do not follow them, or in greedy hope that they may pass a little of their power onto us if we do.

Very occasionally, however, we can come across an individual whose power is of a very different type. An individual whose moral exactness carries profound weight. Power that comes from their own concern for others and willingness to serve. Such individuals speak with a force that seems to shake the very foundations of our world. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa of Calcutta all spring to mind. There is an attractiveness to their approach that compels us to follow them. We do not follow such people out of any hope of self-gain, except that we may also develop the same kind of concern and moral grounding.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 46

Today is the feast of Christ the King, but Jesus is a king quite unlike any other. He does not come with the power of the sword. His power does not rest in nuclear warheads or an over inflated bank balance. Jesus is quite unlike any earthly king. Jesus is the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy, Jesus is 'the Lord Our Righteous Saviour',<sup>2</sup> and he saves us by the nature of his power. Jesus' power is something far less tangible and yet stronger than any other force on earth. Jesus' power is limitless love. And Jesus reveals the profound depth of that love through service of others. That service leads him to be flogged almost to the point of death and hung like a criminal to die on a cross; hung in the baking heat of the desert outside the city walls. But Jesus' love is so profound that even at the point of death he is able to resist the temptation to self-pity. Instead he becomes completely consumed with concern for another person's plight. First he prays for those who have done this to him to be forgiven by the Father. And then, with an effort that must have consumed him with pain, he lifts his head and says to the criminal beside him on the cross, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise'.<sup>3</sup>

In Luke's version of the crucifixion, this is Jesus' last act before he dies.

Why does Jesus say this? There must have been so many other concerns on his mind. What had the criminal done to justify Jesus literally using his last breath to reassure him?

Well, by defending Jesus from the insults being thrown at him, the criminal reveals a heart that is capable of receiving the true love Jesus brings. This so called criminal is willing to open himself up to the abuse

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 23:6

<sup>3</sup> Luke 23:34,43

and ridicule of others in order to protect Jesus from the same. And let us not forget that these would be the criminal's final hours too. By his actions, the criminal reveals his belief that Jesus, this lonely carpenter hung naked and in agony on the cross, is worth protecting. At this moment he believes that Jesus is indeed God's son and declares with one of his final acts on this earth that he is willing to follow Jesus' example.

I wonder if it was his proximity to Jesus that influenced his actions? Like any king, the closer we get to Jesus the more we are influenced by his power. This is why we meet him in the Eucharist every week. By listening to God's holy word and receiving Jesus' precious body and blood in the bread and wine, we move closer to him and if we are open to it, his power transforms us into a community of love.

But unlike all other kings, his gift is free. We don't have to do anything to receive it. It is not reserved for the good and withheld from the bad – otherwise, as the writer of the Psalms notes in Psalm 130: 'if you, Lord, kept a record of our sins who could stand'? That is the marvellous thing, Christ our King recognises that we are all sinful and fall short, but he does not hold that against us. He knows of what we are made; he knows we are but dust. He bestows on us his love, no matter what. Can you believe that?

This knowledge transforms us, but for most of us there is something that stops us short. We desperately want to believe that Jesus loves us and offers that love freely, but something in our past or our present situation stops us and makes us doubt whether this can really be true. "How can Jesus love someone like me? Everyone else here seems so much closer to him than I am. They look more prayerful. They read their bibles

more often. They talk so much more confidently about Jesus than I could ever do.”

Bunkum! What a load of nonsense. Can you see into your neighbour’s heart? Can you see into mine? I am thankful not. Can you know how well I pray? When I kneel in prayer, I try to focus on the right things, but all too often my mind wanders. I did not follow my calling to be a priest because I can pray well, but because I have so much more I need to do.

We all have those dark places that we don’t want anyone to see. If we feel that we are unworthy of God’s love, that is not Him doing that, it is us.

“I know he sees every part of me, even the bits that I refuse to see myself, and I can feel ashamed. I can struggle to believe that he can truly love someone like me.”

***But that is the King that Jesus is!!!*** He will not punish us unfairly. He will not hold a grudge against us. He is not an earthly king! His forgiveness is limitless so long as our heart is ready to hear it and receive it. ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise’.<sup>4</sup>

So what stops our hearts from receiving it?

Do we really believe we can be forgiven? Do we really believe that love can be that profound and limitless? Are we willing to forgive ourselves? Are we willing to let others leave the past behind too? ***Jesus is.***

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:43

Are you not swept away with the power of God's love? You should be! 'The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress', so 'Be still and know that' he is 'God'. Be still and know. Be still. **Just Be.**<sup>5</sup>

Be who God made you to be, people formed by his love, in his love, for his love. A love found in service of each other. Is this not a king you wish to be close to? Is this not a king you wish to follow? Is this not a king you wish to serve?

***So come close to him. Follow him. Serve him.***

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 46