



PARISH OF HAWLEY
Holy Trinity – All Saints
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Dear friends

A friend from my last parish sent me a photo this week showing a church in Southampton which had been bombed in the Second World War. It had completely lost its roof; the walls were plainly damaged and I'd be surprised if the remaining structure was safe. But the interior, though now exposed to the elements, had been cleared of debris sufficiently for people to be able to gather, and in the photograph a priest is saying Mass at the high altar (in the open air) with a large number of parishioners in the nave.

Of course one cannot meaningfully make a comparison between the dangers to which citizens in this country were exposed during the war, and the risks we now face. Not least because in a pandemic the risks are invisible, whereas bombs and bombers (at least until the arrival of the V2 rocket) were all too visible. But I couldn't help being struck by the very obvious difference in *attitude*. Nothing, it seemed, was going to be stopping those Southampton folk from gathering for divine worship – a priority in their lives which had no doubt become all the more significant to them as the dangers to which they were daily exposed had increased.

Nobody, it goes without saying, should be forced, or guilt-tripped, into setting aside their own perfectly reasonable assessments of the risks if they know that they, or those with whom they come into contact, may be vulnerable. It is completely appropriate that many of our congregation have made that responsible decision for themselves and will wait until things are a lot more certain and settled before venturing back. In most cases no doubt that is likely to have to await the large-scale roll-out of the promised vaccines; and I totally understand and respect that.

But it is astonishing to me how meekly the Churches have accepted the *imposition* of closure by Government decree, when they have all gone (as we have in Hawley) to great lengths to make their buildings and their practices Covid-secure, and when there is *no evidence at all* that church services have contributed in any way to the surge in cases which brought about the present lockdown.

What, I wonder, would those Southampton parishioners have made of the present-day Church's reaction to the pandemic? Perhaps they might have been understanding; perhaps they might have recognised that our situation is in many ways not really analogous to theirs and so calls for a different response. But, looking at that photo, I cannot avoid the feeling that the *attitude*, the degree to which the maintenance of Christian worship is central to the life of the people and to the thinking of those who make decisions in Church and State, is very different. And I cannot help feeling somewhat ashamed at the contrast.

We will, nonetheless, continue to abide by the regulations as they have been made by the Government and accepted (albeit with grumbles) by the C of E; and therefore *communal* worship is still suspended. As has been happening for the last two weeks, I shall be saying Mass *privately* in Holy Trinity during the week, and after Mass I shall be happy to give Holy Communion from the Reserved Sacrament to anyone who approaches me seeking it. (But **please note** that this week I shall be doing so on Monday and Friday only, at the usual time of 11:30 am, and **not on Wednesday**.)

With my prayers and good wishes

William.

Ezekiel 34.11-17

God called Ezekiel to prophesy against the leaders of Israel, who'd been bad shepherds, feeding themselves rather than their sheep and exercising power instead of caring for the sick or lost. As a result, sheep were scattered, and some eaten by wild animals. God steps in as a good shepherd, keeping the whole flock in view, rescuing the lost and watching over the healthy.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who tells Peter to 'feed his lambs' and 'tend his sheep' (John 21:15-17) and the Holy Spirit enables the apostles to be shepherds of the flock '...which he purchased with his own blood' (Acts 20:28).

The Ordinal reminds bishops that they: 'are called to serve and care for the flock of Christ... to love and pray for those committed to their charge, knowing their people and being known by them.' Priests share in this ministry of shepherding the flock and diaconal ministry picks up God's special concern for the weak and powerless, the sick and the lost. The flock is precious!

Jesus is of course the chief shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) and as today's psalm reminds us: 'The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want' (Psalm 23:1).

O Sing unto the Lord

The Solemnity of Christ the King is a relatively recent addition to the Calendar, having been instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, originally observed on the last Sunday in October and then moved in 1970 to the final Sunday of the Church Year. Pope Pius was keen to emphasise the place of Christ as our ultimate King in response to the growing tide of secularism and nationalism throughout Europe; the wonderful hymn *Hail Redeemer, King divine* expresses these very sentiments. The words are by Patrick Brennan (1877-1952) an Irish priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, known as the 'Redemptorists'. The usual tune is *King Divine*, written for these words by Charles Rigby (1901-1962), a Lancastrian. Different hymnals have printed varied verses, and some have sadly omitted the wonderful final refrain: Sing all tongues, let none be dumb / Sacred Heart, thy kingdom come! / To the King of ages then / Honour, glory, love. Amen. As we end the Church Year and look towards the Advent season, we keep these words in our hearts and minds and pray for God's kingdom to come, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Prayers to Remember

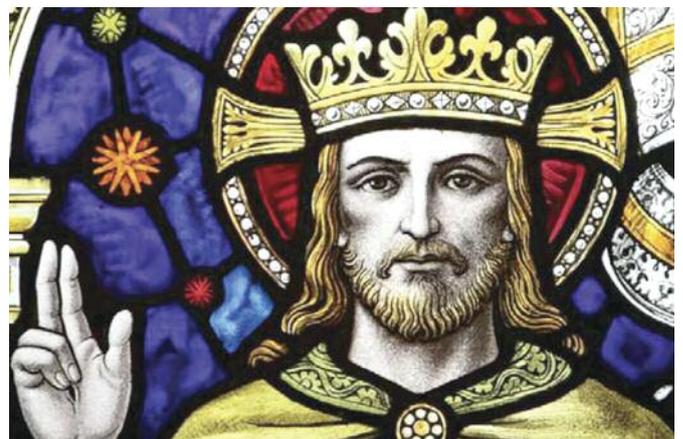
Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Collect for the Sunday next before Advent (Stir up Sunday), Book of Common Prayer (1662)

22nd November
2020

Christ the King

The Shepherd King



Most of us make resolutions for the calendar New Year, but normally all that happens if we fail is that we continue to be less fit and slender than we'd like!

Today's feast marks the end of the liturgical year. Unlike earthly kings in the Bible who often use and abuse their power, Jesus's kingship is focused on both judgment *and* protection, reflected in the link between being a king *and* a shepherd – the judge and the pastor.

The gospel reading makes it clear that we can't shrug our shoulders and say: 'that's just the way things are' because we will be held accountable. Both the sheep and the goats are surprised about where they stand before God. He knows the secrets of our hearts and can judge with greater insight and justice than any human court, but exercised with mercy and love. Christ uses his kingship for protection and care – he is our Good Shepherd who wants to lead his sheep to safety.

As individuals and congregations, we must reflect honestly on how effectively we demonstrate God's love. We'll sometimes fail, but Christ still loves us, and the Holy Spirit will inspire and equip us to do his work.