

THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE - C

This is the last Sunday of the year when the Church leads us in contemplation of Christ, King of the whole of Creation. In the gospel reading we have a short extract from Luke's account of Christ's crucifixion with two reactions, one with faith and the other lacking the faith to believe in Christ's redemptive work. In the first reading we have the account of David being crowned king of Israel, David to whom the promise of an everlasting dynasty was made which is realised in the person of Christ the everlasting, universal king. In the second reading a hymn of praise from Paul to the Father for the work he achieved in his Son.

The **First Reading** is from the second book of Samuel which only briefly mentions the political consequences of king David's reign. The troublesome Philistines were repelled for good and the rest of the national territory was unified with absorption of many Canaanite enclaves including, importantly, Jerusalem which became the political and religious capital. David extended his authority further into Transjordan and to the northeast into southern Syria. Nonetheless when David died in 970, national unity had not been achieved and the two sections of his kingdom Judah and Israel to the north, soon found themselves at loggerheads again. The books of Samuel have a religious lesson. They reveal the conditions in which a kingdom of God might be expected to function and the difficulties that might be experienced. The ideal was only achieved in the reign of David. King Saul, before David, was a failure and their successors, by their sinful conduct, thwarted the growth of God's kingdom. It is the promises made in Nathan's prophecy, 2Sam. 7.15-16, that sustained and nourished the messianic hope through the centuries.

The reading, 5.1-3, is the second account of David being anointed as king. The first occurs in 2 Samuel 2.4 when David is anointed at Hebron, the most important city of Judah, by the men of Judah. In our reading David is anointed king by the Israelites, peoples of the northern tribes, a second anointing at Hebron. The two groups although acknowledging one king remain separated and internal tensions continue. In the days when Saul was an ineffectual king, 'All Israel and Judah loved David' since he had led all the people in their campaigns. The promise mentioned in the reading is found in 3.10, 'Yahweh has sworn to David to take the sovereignty from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel as well as Judah.' David brings some harmony between north and south. True peace and harmony were not achieved by David among God's Chosen People this will only be achieved by the final victory of the successor to David's line, Jesus, the Son of David.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 121,1-5, is one of the Songs of Ascent sung by pilgrims on the way up to Jerusalem. The city is seen in the psalm as God's house so the pilgrims rejoice and can't wait until 'At last our feet are standing at your gates, Jerusalem.' The city is a symbol of the unity of the chosen people, of divine favours and messianic promises, a 'city of peace.' The pilgrims stood at the gates when they arrived and saluted them with the cry '*shalom*,' a peace which was part of the messianic hope finally to be achieved in that city by Christ the Universal King.

The **Second Reading** is from St Paul's letter to the Colossians. In this letter Paul is trying to deal with Jewish speculation which the churches at Colossae had taken up. They thought the celestial or cosmic powers were responsible for the regular movement of the cosmos and they attached an importance to these powers that threatened the supremacy of Christ. Paul writes to show that these powers have a subordinate place in the scheme of salvation and that Christ, raised up to heaven, governs the whole cosmos which is influenced by the saving act of the one, only Lord of all creation.

The reading, 1.12-20, is one of the classic passages from Paul's writings and is prayed by the Church in her evening prayer every Wednesday. It comes at the beginning of the letter and is part of Paul's formal instruction dealing with the belief that the celestial powers were more powerful than Christ. The first three verses are an introduction, we give thanks because we the gentile people are called to join the company of 'God's holy people' made possible by being rescued from the dark and brought into the kingdom of light. There follows the hymn or poem in which Paul explains that Christ is the head of everything that exists. He is the head of creation, that is of all that exists naturally and he is head of the new creation and of all that exists supernaturally through redemption. The subject of the poem is the pre-existent Christ who is manifested in the unique historic person, Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. He is the First-born in the order of creation for in him all things in heaven and earth were created and following his death and resurrection he is the First-born who reconciled all things to God and has therefore the right to the honour of receiving the first place. Paul has a deep understanding in those very early days of the Church's life.