



Today is a day when we are invited to turn an idea upside down - to stand on its head the meaning of the word 'king'.

Opening Prayer:

Thank you, loving God, for giving us a king unlike any other; for rescuing us from all our false ideas of importance, power, glory and majesty. By your grace, help us to get into the true spirit of things, and to show you a worship which fits your sublime humility. For your love's sake. Amen.

Hymn: Christ Triumphant, Ever Reigning (StF 319, tune: Guiting Power) *Michael Saward*

On You Tube this song begins at 1.25 on the time bar here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at2szZZNRfk>

Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King,
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
Hear us as we sing:

*Yours the glory and the crown,
The high renown, the eternal name.*

Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
By your humble birth:

Suffering Servant, scorned, ill-treated,
Victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
Sinners justified:

Priestly King, enthroned forever
High in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
Stifle hymns of love:

So, our hearts and voices raising
Through the ages long,
Ceaselessly upon You gazing,
This shall be our song:

Reading – John 18.33-37

Reflection: For most of the Church's history there was no such thing as the Feast of Christ the King. It wasn't until 1922 that it became such a major festival. The story of that is a fascinating one full of irony and intrigue and sheer political skulduggery. By 1922 Benito Mussolini had become Prime Minister of Italy and Adolf Hitler had become the leader of the Nazi Party in Germany. In 1922 the Pope was involved in negotiations with Mussolini which led, just a few short years later, to the establishing of the Vatican City and the granting of its permanent status as an independent state. It was from this intriguing background of an increasing spread of fascism across Europe that the Feast of Christ the King emerged. The Pope in 1922 was a certain Pius XI who was attempting to sure up the political status and independence of the Vatican. As part of the deal with the fascists, the Vatican took action to suppress the only democratic party in Italy, the Italian Socialist Party. You see, Pius was no lover of democracy. As a politician he much preferred negotiating treaties with monarchies and authoritarian regimes, whereby one supreme ruler was able to make decisions binding on everyone else. Both Mussolini and Hitler granted the Roman church wide-ranging favours in exchange for the Church's political silence on the shenanigans of the fascists.

So, in a massive irony, the Feast of Christ the King was created out of a political agenda. It was established in order to sure up the Vatican's power AND the power of those regimes with whom the Vatican had negotiated. The intention was to reinforce the message that the Church wanted obedient subjects and that the Kingship of Christ was to be envisaged in terms of an absolute European monarch. How about that: the Feast of Christ the King came out of a devil's pact 100 years ago between the Church and the Fascists! So, why on earth would we continue to observe this Feast 100 years later? It is because the circumstances out of which this Feast came and the subsequent years of reflection on the meaning of it have established a wonderful ironic absurdity. It is an irony and an absurdity which, above all else, captures and expresses the true meaning of this Feast and what is meant by the claim that Christ is King. The Gospel reading is our source material, part of John's witness regarding the trial of Jesus before Pilate. Jesus rejects the word 'king' and yet, ironically, with the same breath he speaks of his own 'kingship'.

'King' is never going to be the right word for Jesus. In the gospels, whenever the crowds wanted to proclaim Jesus as their king, he ran away from them. The word 'king', as it is understood in our political world, is clearly the wrong

word for Jesus, and yet we do, deliberately, continue to use that very word because, by deliberately using this wrong word, we create a powerful metaphor which reveals a more profound truth. When we say that for us, Jesus is King, we are saying that for us, **no one else** is king. In saying that we belong to the Kingdom of Jesus, we are saying that we are not submissive citizens of **any** other kingdom. We are saying that Jesus and his agenda sets our agenda. We are declaring for all to hear that **we will not** give unquestioning allegiance to any other authority. We do not set out to be hostile or seditious towards the countries we live in, but neither are we willing to cooperate with them when they ask us to compromise the values of love and justice and hospitality to advance their own national interests and agendas. Our allegiance is to the King of Love whose kingdom is not defined by national boundaries. Our allegiance is to the One who will go to the cross before he will sell out the truth or sell out our desperate brothers and sisters around the world. Jesus of Nazareth before Pilate ends up as a lonely figure, despised and mocked, subjected to unimaginable thuggery by the young men of the Roman Army and then, when they have finished with him, taken to the town's stinking rubbish dump, and strung up to die in utter desolation and humiliation. In the apparent absurdity and foolishness of looking to **this man** and naming him as our only king is the irony writ large. As those who adore this king and as citizens of this kingdom our identity as a dissident people in this world is established beyond all doubt. Adoringly, our faith is grounded in the One whose kingdom is definitely NOT of this world and whose power and glory are revealed in the unquenchable force of suffering love, now and forever. Amen.

CONSPIRING PRAYERS: Great lover of humanity, we seek your blessing on the people of this world and an ever-increasing awareness of our connection to them and our responsibility for each other. Tear us away from all that evades the truth and thereby adds to misery. Gather us in towards your light and love and peace.

Let your Spirit challenge and transform Christian congregations that are self-satisfied. Discomfort those that are so entrenched in practices that they treat anyone who does not share their dogma or lifestyle as a sinner and an enemy. Let your Spirit challenge and transform communities where racism and injustice are accepted as normal, or even lauded a good thing. Break through closed minds and soften hard hearts, that the inclusive love of Christ may be embraced and practiced. Let your Spirit challenge and transform families that foster arrogance and disrespect of others. Bring to account those who cultivate indifference towards their neighbours and esteem the plundering of the weak and vulnerable. Let your Spirit challenge and transform each of us. That free of self-justification, and relying totally on your grace, we may be Christians who give our best without counting the cost and accept our limitations without self-disparagement.

Great lover of humanity, we seek your blessing on those whose lives are in disarray: those who have lost their jobs, endured the pain of a breakup, been diagnosed with serious illness, suffered in a road accident, watched their loved ones die, and any who are despairing or are contemplating suicide. *In the stillness we share our personal concerns with God....* Holy Friend, while we have been praying, you have been busy answering our petitions with an ineffable wisdom and an indefatigable love. Thank you. Through Christ, Jesus our Saviour. **And so say all of us.**

Hymn: In a Byre Near Bethlehem (StF 324 Tune: Wild Mountain Thyme) *John L. Bell and Graham Maule*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIBAWo27U2I>

In a byre near Bethlehem,
passed by many a wandering stranger
the most precious Word of Life
was heard gurgling in a manger,
for the good of us all.

*And he's here when we call him,
bringing health, love and laughter,
to life now and ever after,
for the good of us all.*

By the Galilean Lake
where the people flocked for teaching,
the most precious Word of Life
fed their mouths as well as preaching,
for the good of us all.

Quiet was Gethsemane,
camouflaging priest and soldier ;
the most precious Word of Life
took the world's weight on his shoulder,
for the good of us all.

On the hill of Calvary —
place to end all hope of living —
the most precious Word of Life
breathed his last and died, forgiving,
for the good of us all.

In a garden, just at dawn,
near the grave of human violence,
the most precious Word of Life
cleared his throat and ended silence,
for the good of us all.

Blessing: Let us go in peace, for we go in the name of Christ, to the glory of the Father, in the power of the Spirit of God. Amen.