

EPIPHANY – YEAR A
Responsorial Psalm – Ps 72(71)

“Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him.”

According to tradition, this psalm is a prayer written by King David for his son, Solomon – the great and wise king who would succeed David, and who would eventually build the Temple in Jerusalem. So why has the Church prescribed this psalm to be sung at Mass on Epiphany? What connection does the Church see between this psalm and our celebration of this feast day?

I think it’s because the Church sees a deeper meaning here. Yes, the psalm points to the great King Solomon; but like so many Old Testament texts, it also points beyond – to who Christ is. This is the meaning grasped by Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, who cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” [Mk 10:46-52]. This was what was grasped by the wise men who came to pay homage to the child Jesus, bringing – along with frankincense and myrrh – gold, representing Christ’s kingship [Mt 2:1-12]. This was the meaning echoed in Jesus’ words:

“...for [the queen of the South] came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” [Lk 11:31]

Through this psalm, then, the Church invites us to reflect and meditate on Jesus as the Son of David, the true successor of David’s throne, the promised king of the nations, the One who is “greater than Solomon”, before whom “all kings shall fall prostrate”. But what do we mean when we say that Christ is King? What practical effect should Christ’s kingship have in our lives?

Many people throughout history of the Church attempted to interpret Christ’s kingship in political terms. Some say that the Kingdom of Heaven serves as the exemplar upon which all earthly kingdoms ought to be modelled – thus, according to this view, a monarchy is the most moral form of government, for all earthly monarchs participating in Christ’s kingship. On the other hand, others say that Christ’s kingship means that we ought to have no king but Christ – all earthly monarchs are mere pretenders to the throne which rightly belongs to Christ alone. Thus, we ought to be republicans.

However, if this is what we take away from meditating on Christ’s kingship, then I think we have missed the point. Yes, it is right and just that we desire for all earthly nations to be subjected to Christ’s reign – but before we ask what this means in political terms, it is more important that we first examine our own lives: Do I fall prostrate before Him? Do I enthrone Him in my heart? Is Jesus Christ the king of my whole world, or are there other things that I regard as more important than my relationship with Him.

St Thomas Aquinas lists four things that we often prioritise ahead of God: wealth, honour, power, and pleasure. These things are not evil in themselves – indeed, wealth, honour, power, and pleasure are often good things, and can be used to achieve moral ends and goals. Wealth can be used to help the poor and the outcast; we honour people whose actions we deem praiseworthy; power can be used to correct injustices; pleasure helps us appreciate good things in life.

But if we allow these goods to take priority ahead of our relationship with the Lord, then these are what we enthrone in our hearts instead of Jesus Christ; these are the things that become our false

idols and stumbling blocks. So, we ought to examine our own consciences: What are the things that I value in my heart more than Jesus? What are the things that tempt and distract me away from my true King?

Again, we might find that what distracts us are often good things. But we must orient, in our hearts, all good things to Jesus Christ. No political affiliation or cause, no matter how righteous and just, can take precedence over our relationship with God. All of our cultural heritage and traditions, our sexuality, our liturgical preferences, our ambitions and desires, our worries and concerns – all of these must be subjected to the reign of Jesus Christ the King.

And what kind of king is He? Let us picture in our minds the image that the Christmas narrative paints for us. Wealth? – He has none; no royal palace, no servants, no ornate crown for His head. Who was there to honour Him? – no royal delegation, nor court of nobles. Instead, there were shepherds – humble people living on the outskirts of society – and the wise men – foreigners and gentiles. Power? – here He is a mere infant, utterly dependent on Mary and Joseph; He is powerless and vulnerable. Pleasure? – He does not even have a bed to lie in; instead He lies in a manger, amid the stench of the animals.

And then let us cast our minds to Calvary. As He hangs on the cross, what wealth does He have? – He is stripped of all his clothes. What honour? – He is mocked and ridiculed, rejected by the people He came to save. What power? – for our sake, the Righteous Judge of the world humbled Himself, and allowed Himself to be judged and condemned to death by us mere humans. And what pleasure? – He was brutally tortured and killed for us.

And yet... this is the King of Glory. This is He before whom every knee shall bend. This is the king who became one of us, and went ahead of us to show us the way. This is He who says to us, "Come follow me."

Christ asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" Well, who is Jesus to us? When we profess that Christ is King, are we simply paying Him lip-service? Am I like the people of Jerusalem crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!", only to turn around and shout, "Crucify Him!... We have no king but Caesar!"

Perhaps this is what we are being invited to take away and reflect on. For if we want to bring all nations under Christ's kingship, we must first subject our hearts and our lives to the Lord. We must first learn to fall prostrate before Him. We must cast down all the false kings that we have crowned in our hearts, and enthrone Jesus as the King of kings.