

CHRIST THE KING

By

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WE know Christ was to have been a king, because for one thing he was to sit on the throne of David his father. Pilate, when he said provokingly, 'Art thou a king then?' spoke more truly than he was aware. The populace that haunted Jesus's footsteps, that followed, followed for the sake of a miracle, it too was convinced that Jesus was the king who was to come. On one occasion they went so far as to attempt force in order to have their way with him; but he fled to the mountains alone.

It was certainly this riotous and revolutionary attitude of the crowd that made our Lord, not disown the title, but avoid it. Nevertheless on two great occasions he bore it publicly, and once he suffered it, when mockingly acknowledged, in silence.

The first occasion was Palm Sunday. Of all the scenes in the New Testament, that is one of the most strange. Christ had implied he would not go up to Jerusalem at that time, but he had gone up alone. The ferment of excitement was such in his regard, and the fear of tumult so great, that he lived on the hill to the East in the little village just over the crest, the village of Bethany. It was Jesus's great endeavour to say all he had to say, yet keep the people from rising against their masters, Roman or Pharisee, in violent fashion. The one thing, you would think, that he wanted to avoid was a public demonstration. Yet was he not a king, and had he not a right and a duty to fulfil the ancient prophecies? He was King of the Jews and of their capital city, the City of God. So, once, he allowed the people their way, he even cooperated by riding upon an ass, a royal mount in the East; he allowed the wildly exultant men and women to cry out 'Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest' (*Matt.* 21:9). For the prophet had said, 'Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold thy king cometh to thee, meek and sitting upon an ass . . .' (*Isaias* 62:11). The wonder and mystery is that this demonstration on the large scale, this moment the populace had been waiting for, did not develop in the way they wanted, or hoped; Christ did not give the signal for falling upon the Roman soldiers. The whole affair subsided, died away. A week later these same people were winding along in another procession, perhaps bewildered, more likely vindictive, and considering the end a fitting one for a man who seemed to have the whole world at his feet and had refused it. They did not know that such a kingdom Jesus had refused right at the beginning of his public life, when Satan took him to the top of a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the

earth; and he had refused to worship Leviathan instead of God. King he was, but not a king after the heart of the Jews, nor after the heart of many of us for the matter of that.

The next scene in which the kingship of Christ comes is the night before his death after the Jews have handed him over to Pilate. We are allowed to witness one of the cruellest scenes in history. Some Roman soldiers (who knows, they may have been our own ancestors?) dressed him up as a king in purple robe and head crowned, sceptre in hand. Then they did mock obeisance. But to show their contempt more clearly, in case he who could read all hearts might be deceived into thinking they really meant their homage, they spat in his face and clouted him over the head, and snatching the sceptre they beat his crown with it, so that the jewels in this strange crown, the thorns, should penetrate the skull.

We are like the thoughtless crowd, we imagine we know of what world our Lord is King, we gather round and shout and sing, pride ourselves that we are in the stream. Then, maybe like them, we suddenly come to a halt and in a flash know that this procession is not going to the imperial palace, but to the crucifixion. Sometimes we are openly hostile, and knowing right well that we hate this kind of kingship, we deride it, we demonstrate against it. But Christ remains silent and forgiving.

Yet Christ was king. On the Cross where he died a true inscription was fixed, not saying 'I am' king of the Jews, but plainly and in the languages of the world they lived in: *This is Jesus, the King of the Jews*. Nor would Pilate change the title. Perhaps he knew that Jesus had told him the truth. But Pilate had not the courage to acknowledge that he had that day seen a great light.

'My kingdom is not of this world.

If my kingdom were of this world,

My servants would certainly strive

That I should not be delivered to the Jews:

But now my kingdom is not from hence'.

Pilate therefore said to him: 'Art thou a king, then?'

Jesus answered: 'Thou sayest, that I am a king.

For this was I born,

And for this came I into the world;

That I should give testimony to the truth

Everyone that is of the truth, heareth my voice'.

(*John* 18:36.)

If Christ were king, then where was his kingdom? His life was now ended; the confines of it had not been made plain, for men expect kings to have kingdoms. But at least one man had understood, and he the most unlikely citizen. A voice spoke from one of the gibbets beside Jesus: 'Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom' (*Luke* 23:42). Christ's kingdom was in paradise.

Christ's kingdom is the kingdom of heaven, but it is also on this earth. In a sense it has come already, and in a sense it has not. Jesus gave us the prayer, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven', but he also said, 'Behold the kingdom of God is here, within you'. The reason why we find this confusing is that we expect a kingdom to have boundaries and customs houses, and armies and navies, police and local customs. Whereas the kingdom of Christ is the Messianic kingdom, that is to know no boundaries, that is to subjugate all peoples under its gentle yoke of peace; and all kings should be willing to submit to the 'King of kings', the 'Lord of lords'. Even after these two thousand years the idea of a spiritual kingdom still seems alien to us, unreal, unrealisable, when it is the only real one and the only one that ever could be effected. 'For the kingdom of God is not in speech, but in power' (I Cor. 4:20). And by power St Paul meant the life of Christ. 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you being gathered together and in my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus' (5:4). For as is stated in St John's Gospel (3:3), 'Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. The new birth is birth into the body of Christ, the sharing in his life and power. Consequently, as soon as a man truly believes in Christ he is in the kingdom, for as St John goes on (3:14): 'That whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have eternal life'.

If the kingdom of Christ may be entered into in this life, how are those who find the way in to live? Not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 7:21). The law of Christ was not to be written on slabs of stone, 'but in the fleshly tables of the heart' (II Cor. 3:3).

Because Christ is king, then he has a kingdom. That kingdom is our minds and our bodies; he is the ruler over our spirit and our flesh. We are citizens of the world because there is a kingdom whose extent is as extensive as the world, that kingdom is Christ's and we are members of it. Every other king is but his viceroy who must obey his law if he will claim our allegiance. We are not under two rival authorities, but one, and all the rest are delegated. All authority comes from God. It so happens that he has divided his delegation into two, one to exercise his spiritual authority, the other the material.

In St Augustine's time and in ours there is a division; there are two cities, the city of God and the city of this world. That need not be, and it only comes about because those in the city of this world do not submit to the gentle ruling of Christ. Too often there is a struggle between the spiritual and lay authorities. Both are independent of each other in their own spheres, but both subject to Christ.

There is the crux in our modern life. For long now the civil power has shaken off the royal mantle of Christ and dared to stand alone in its own power and not 'in the power of Christ'. The law of Christ is ignored in public life. There is little attempt at social justice, no recognition that Christ is at the basis of the building we call society. Christ has been hounded out of education, out of public morals, his laws flouted, divorce, abortion and vice encouraged. We, as citizens of the kingdom, as vowed followers of Christ the King by our baptism, and vowed to be Christ's soldiers by Confirmation, must make Christ reign once more.

Firstly in our own hearts, making his life our law;
 Secondly in the family, making Nazareth our model,
 Thirdly in society, rejoicing in the guidance of his Vicar and
 in the just commands of our king.

Fourthly in international affairs, where jungle rules still reign.
 Thus will restoration of Christ's kingdom come; for King he
 is. Hail, Christ the King!

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION

BY
 'MEDICUS'

READERS of the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT have good reason to be grateful to Père M. J. Nicolas, O.P. for his fine exposition of 'The True Basis of Religious Life'. At the beginning of his article he raises one of the most difficult problems facing religious orders at the present day. He is acutely conscious of the difficulties that modern temperaments have in adapting themselves to the traditional system of religious life with its discipline and restraints, particularly in the older and the strictly enclosed Orders. With great sympathy and frankness he recognises that these difficulties have to be faced both from the point of view of aspirants themselves and that of Superiors who try to help them.

Père Nicolas considers the problem first as one of health. Since the Editor has invited discussion, perhaps some comments may be permitted from a medical and especially a psychological point of view.

Health, in its narrowest sense, is not in question; freedom from serious bodily and mental disease is of course essential. It is rather a question of temperament, character and psycho-physical constitution.

In any group of novices there may be one or two who cause special anxiety. Apart from those who leave of their own accord or have to be told they have no vocation, there are some whose vocation seems perpetually in doubt. They vary greatly in temperament and character; some are highly strung, sensitive, proud,