



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Christ the King

Fr Frank Brennan SJ
Rector, Newman College University of Melbourne
20 November 2022

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/frank-brennan-6/homily-131122>

2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 121; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/frank-brennan-6/homily-201122>

For most of us 21st century Australians, the feast of Christ the King seems slightly off-key, a celebration from a bygone era. Even those Australian Catholics who are monarchists, retaining a strong commitment to the British monarch being our Australian head of state, are likely to find any comparisons of Jesus as our King and Charles as our King unhelpful and even jarring. It's one thing to pray to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour; it's another to imagine him as our king.

The feast was decreed by Pope Pius XI in 1925: 'by Our Apostolic Authority We institute the Feast of the Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ to be observed yearly throughout the whole world'.¹

Many of us just don't see the world or the Church in the same way as people did a century ago. I daresay Pius XI's world view was very different from that of our present pope Francis. For example in making his declaration of the feast, Pope Pius wrote in his encyclical Quas Primas:

'If We ordain that the whole Catholic world shall revere Christ as King, We shall minister to the need of the present day, and at the same time provide an excellent remedy for the plague which now infects society. We refer to the plague of anti-clericalism, its errors and impious activities. This evil spirit, as you are well aware, Venerable Brethren, has not come into being in one day; it has long lurked beneath the surface. The empire of Christ over all nations was rejected. The right which the Church has from Christ himself, to teach mankind, to make laws, to

¹ Pius XI, Quas Primas #28 available at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_11121925_quas-primas.html



govern peoples in all that pertains to their eternal salvation, that right was denied.²

For Pius XI, you could never get enough clericalism. The problem was anti-clericalism. Compare and contrast. Francis is fond of saying that 'the greatest evil in the Church is spiritual worldliness. It's the worst thing that can happen to the Church, worse than the libertine popes.' According to Francis, spiritual worldliness 'makes clericalism grow' and clericalism is 'a perversion of the Church' which leads to different forms of 'rigidity'.³

Pius saw the Church as a perfect society having 'a natural and inalienable right to perfect freedom and immunity from the power of the state; and that in fulfilling the task committed to her by God of teaching, ruling, and guiding to eternal bliss those who belong to the kingdom of Christ, she cannot be subject to any external power.'⁴ Imagine how it would have gone for us trying to deal with the outrage of child sexual abuse in the Church by invoking that sort of approach.

Those days have well and truly gone. And thank God they have. So what to make of the feast? What spiritual profit can we draw from the vision of Pius XI that Christ's 'kingly dignity demands that the State should take account of the commandments of God and of Christian principles, both in making laws and in administering justice, and also in providing for the young a sound moral education.'⁵

Contemplating the kingdom which is to come, the kingdom in the next life, the kingdom in which Christ reigns, we contemplate a situation in which justice is perfected and where truth is sacrosanct. As Christians we hope and pray that something of that Kingdom can be part of our reality here and now.

During the week, we have witnessed the scenes outside the Netherlands court with the three judges in The Hague District Court finding 2 Russians and 1 Ukrainian guilty of mass murder by the 'grotesque' and 'cruel' downing of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 killing all 298 persons on board.

Meryn O'Brien whose son Jack was killed in the plane crash welcomed the decision but with reservations: 'It's a measure of justice, but it would be complete

² Ibid, #11.

³ <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2022/02/greatest-evil-in-the-church-is-spiritual-worldliness-pope-says>

⁴ Pius XI, Quas Primas #31.

⁵ Ibid, #32.



justice if our family members were restored to us.' Meryn knew that 'complete justice' could never be administered by this court, no matter what its resources and integrity. Some family members thought justice could be better done if those convicted were actually placed behind bars. Others wanted to hear Russian authorities admit responsibility.

Our Foreign Minister Penny Wong said, 'The delivery of these verdicts is an important step in efforts to hold those responsible to account. It delivers the answers families have sought. It delivers confirmation that the Russian Federation have responsibility. Nothing will bring the people who were lost back but we can ensure that the world knows the truth and that legal responsibility is attributed and that is what has happened today.'

Julie Bishop who was Foreign Minister at the time of the disaster 8 years ago called out the lie: 'Russia claimed they weren't involved in eastern Ukraine, but they were not Ukrainian farmers who were able to deploy a surface-to-air Buk missile and shoot down a commercial plane at 33,000 feet.'

Tony Abbott who was Prime Minister at the time said, 'Nothing can bring back those who should never have been killed nor lift the pain of their grieving families. Still, this confirmation that there was no mystery to their deaths might be some comfort.'

The search for answers, the search for closure, the search for justice and the search for truth go together. When justice and truth meet and when responsibility is admitted and forgiveness offered, we Christians detect some signs of the kingdom which is to come.

On Wednesday, we marked the 33rd anniversary of the assassination of the six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter at the Jesuit university in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. The killers had been commissioned by the US backed military government. Jesuit university presidents from the US went to El Salvador and sat through the trial of the soldiers indicted with the killings. They spent years lobbying US congressmen to withdraw support for the unaccountable military in El Salvador. Fr Don Monan SJ who was President of Boston College was fond of saying, 'The intellectual architects of this crime have never been publicly identified.' Monan used to tell his students: 'We must do all we can to ensure that freedom predominates over oppression, justice over injustice, truth over falsehood, and love over hatred. If the university does not decide to make this commitment, we do not understand what validity it has as a university, much less as a Christian inspired university.'



Guillermo Benavides Moreno, one of the soldiers convicted of the killings, was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment. In March 1993, five days after the UN-backed Truth Commission presented its report on thousands of killings during the civil war, the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly adopted a blanket amnesty law, preventing prosecutions of wartime atrocities. Moreno was then released from prison. In 2016, the Salvadorean Constitutional Court finally ruled that the amnesty law was unconstitutional. Moreno was taken back into custody. This week, Moreno, aged 77, was released from custody. Under Salvadorean law any prisoner aged over 60 can be released from custody if he has served one third of this sentence.

What is justice? What is truth?

Earlier this year a Salvadorean court ordered the arrest of former president Alfredo Cristiani in relation to the 1989 Jesuit killings. Having fled overseas, Cristiani has not fronted the court. The court resolved, 'There is nothing left but to decree the detention against those persons because they did not appear in court and did not send lawyers.'

On this feast of Christ the King, we pray with all those hungry for justice and desperate for truth:

Our Father who art in Heaven
Thy Kingdom Come
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven.
Amen.

We pray for the coming of that kingdom of light and truth, of justice and peace, of responsibility and forgiveness, here and now.

Let us give thanks to the Father, who has made it possible for us to join the saints and with them to inherit the light. Because that is what he has done: he has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a place for us in the kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of sins.