

## Sundays between 20 and 26 November

### Sunday before Advent Year B (Christ the King)

This Sunday marks the end of Year B in the three-year lectionary cycle. It is celebrated, in the Roman Catholic Church and in some Anglican churches, as the Feast of Christ the King. This festival was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, and moved to this Sunday in 1970. It is an appropriate way to mark the end of the Christian Year, celebrating to the kingship of Christ which is present now, but (in its fullness) is yet to come. Motifs of destiny and purpose surround this image of Christ as King.

#### OT Continuous

##### 2 Sam 23: 1-7

David's last words. In the lives of David and of Solomon, we have stories of flawed heroes. At various points (e.g. Solomon's prayer at his coronation (I Kg 3: 3-9, and at the dedication of the temple (I Kg 8), and here in David's farewell song, there are systematic attempts to paint a more fitting picture. Don't dismiss it as "spin". See it instead as underlining the supreme role of God in shaping the future.

##### Ps 132: 1-12(13-18)

Here is a hymn in praise of Zion, the place where God has chosen to dwell amongst humankind. A divine succession is being established.

#### OT Related

##### Dan 7: 9-10, 13-14

Apocalyptic is the name given to this heavily coded variety of literature. Other examples are obviously Revelation, and Mark 13, which was the gospel for last Sunday morning. The term has also been used loosely to embrace such a wide variety of material as to have no clear meaning. Nonetheless, "apocalyptic" is a very broad term. Characteristic features include: (a) a story; (b) journey(s) to "the heavenly realm"; (c) visions ... ; (d) ... that require interpretation, usually by an angel, and (e) fictive prediction of actual (past) events.

Of particular interest in this reading is the phrase "one like a human being". (Hebr *ben adam*, Aram *bar nasha*); in some older translations "one like a son of man". Appropriated by Jesus, this phrase has "brought forth torrents of scholarly debate" about its meaning. Note: (a) the SoM is a supernatural figure, (b) representing the divine authority (Ancient of Days), who (c) looks like a son of man and (d) exercises authority. Some scholars suggest this was a coded

reference to the Archangel Michael who will do battle on behalf of Israel. This suggests that the SoM is an angelic representative of the people of Israel. We may interpret this passage as symbolising the battles of God's people.

### **Ps 93**

A psalm in praise of God's kingly power, surpassing everything that humanity can aspire to – indeed, surpassing the powers (see v.5) before which mankind quakes in awe. This biblical habit of equating God with awesome power may present us with questions.

### **Epistle Rev 1: 4b-8**

This is the greeting that precedes the seven "letters to the churches", that constitute chapters 1-3 of Revelation. It emphasises the Lordship of God and Jesus his Son. They rule the world, not Caesar or Satan. Note how one of the phrases here ("coming on/with clouds") appropriates an image from Daniel (see below). Many scholars have pointed out the way in which words, phrases and titles used of Jesus (and also by Jesus himself) are clear political statements, because they lay claim, on Jesus' behalf, to words phrases and titles used by the Roman Emperor. King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Bringer of Peace and Prosperity – all these titles were used first of the emperor. For them to be used of Jesus was clearly treasonable.

### **Gospel John 18: 33-37**

This is part of the confrontation between Pilate and Jesus. Theology and politics are both involved, and Jesus plays off one theme against the other, challenging Pilate's ability to act autonomously. The theme of kingship is very prominent. Jesus challenges Pilate (and us, as readers of this gospel) to break free from the image of imperial power. Pilate can't quite get his head round the idea that Jesus' claim to kingship doesn't cut across Caesar's claim to autocratic rule.

The key elements here are surely: the relationship between Jesus' kingdom and the world.

## **Second Service**

### **Dan 5: 1-31**

Belshazzar's feast. What a tale! But what is it all about? Belshazzar was not, strictly, a king, but a vice-regent. Perhaps his partying was an example of hubris. The writing on the wall (mene, mene, tekel u-pharsin) refers to a sequence of coins in descending order of value: e.g. a tenner, a tenner, 10p and two tiddlers (5p). These may represent the five Babylonians kings beginning with Nebuchadnezzar – and ending with Belshazzar! "This place is going to the dogs, and you're the worst of the lot!" Note also the descending value of materials in v4.

### **Ps 72: 1-7 (8-20)**

### **John 6: 1-15**

The feeding of five thousand (men?). Lincoln notes the reference to barley loaves and the young man, inviting parallels with 2 Kg 4. Note also that it is Jesus who opens the conversation about feeding the crowd. And there is no indication that the crowd were already showing signs of hunger. Here perhaps is an example of prevenient grace (though we mustn't overdo this point). It may be that the food is being used here as a metaphor for feeding of another kind.