

Feast of Christ the King

¹ *I will sing forever of your love, O Lord; through all ages my mouth will proclaim your truth. Of this I am sure that your love lasts for ever, that your truth is firmly established as the heavens.* We heard that psalm read at Vigils this morning, the Psalmist rejoicing in the divine qualities of love and truth. All our hope rests in these qualities, in God's love for humankind and in God's eternal fidelity. But why reflect on those words today, on this feast of Christ the King? Perhaps because in Jesus, the Christ, we recognise these divine qualities shining out through his human nature, because in recognising them, we also see his invitation to make them our own.

There is a paradox at the heart of our understanding of divine love and truth. In the Prologue to his Gospel Saint John tells us that ² *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.* Isaiah's description is different: ³ *he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men: a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* How are we to come to terms with Christ the King and the Lord's suffering servant, the one full of grace and truth, who named himself ⁴Truth, the other despised and rejected, having no comeliness, no beauty ? And yet are these two

¹ Psalm 88.1-2

² John 1.14

³ Isaiah 53.2

⁴ John 14.6

facets not part of the whole and does not the one teach us something of the other ?

Saint Paul gets quite shirty at the start of his second letter to the Corinthians. He is replying to their apparent criticism that he couldn't make his mind up about his journey plans. But his reply and self-justification pale into insignificance as he describes Jesus' fidelity: ⁵ *in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him to the glory of God ... it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us.*

This outburst gives us a clue: with Jesus it is always Yes; in him all the promises of God are fulfilled and that is why we utter the Amen through him. Amen, coming from the same root as amunah/truth, an expression of commitment, of fidelity, a word Jesus used regularly to reinforce what he was saying: and thus a word which puts us in relationship with God. For it is God who does the establishing, as Ahaz discovered to his cost, when the Lord told Isaiah to tell him: ⁶ *if you do not believe, surely you will not be established; or as another translation has it: if you do not stand by me, you do not stand at all.* Believing, standing by someone is about having faith in them, about trusting, though it cost everything.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 1.18-20

⁶ Isaiah 7.9

And isn't that what Jesus did ? He trusted his Father, who took that trust, that love, that Amen to the limit and still Jesus said "Yes". What we see in the Lord's suffering servant is faith and love taken to the limit, grace and truth tested to the very edge of human endurance. And still he stood, which is why John can write at the beginning of the Book of Revelation: ⁷ *grace to you from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness*; why he can write to the angel of Laodicea: ⁸*the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.*

Today we celebrate the kingship of Christ, a ⁹kingship not of this world. For in Christ's kingdom the first are last and the last are first; and the King's regalia are lacerated flesh, pierced hands and feet, wounded side, and bruised and bloodied head. He will bear these signs of his kingship for all eternity, the marks of what he suffered for love of us and in faithful obedience to his Father. And we are invited to follow him into his kingdom, invited to respond in faith, by witnessing with our own lives to the ¹⁰greatness of the Father's faithfulness. And how do we speak the Amen, how do we stand firm ¹¹ *in season and out of season* ? By our own fidelity, our own stability; by faithfully living out our monastic calling here and now ... each and every day.

⁷ Revelation 1.5

⁸ Ibid 3.14

⁹ John 18.36

¹⁰ Lamentations 3.23

¹¹ 2 Timothy 4.2