

Sunday Thought

18th September 2022 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22 - 28
Psalm 14
1 Timothy 1: 12 -17
Luke 15: 1 - 10

Orb and Sceptre

Tributes paid to our late Queen Elizabeth have been many, coming from all parts of the land and the wider realms of the Commonwealth. I have heard phrases like, '*an anchor for our society*', '*a constant across seventy years of great changes*', '*the head*', and best of all '*a model for our faith.*' These honest recollections have often been unspoken and taken for granted by so many of us. The life of the nation has revolved around one whose life has been centred in God, as is recognised in the symbols of monarchy – the orb and the sceptre. The orb demonstrates how the queen ruled a worldwide family Kingdom under the reign of Jesus Christ, and the sceptre, again bearing the Cross, stands for the exercise of our Christian Kingdom principles of fairness and justice. It is good that these foundations of monarchy which she so gladly honoured, remain unchanged for King Charles III.



Appropriately, this appears as a dominant thought from this Sunday's scriptures. Paul wrote to his young colleague, Timothy, about conduct, administration and worship in the church at Ephesus. He urged that God must be at the heart of it all with prayer the pivot around which the church's life turns. He explained that prayer in worship should be largely thanksgiving and intercession for ALL people – from rulers to commoners, sinners to saints, because God desires everyone to be saved and to know the truth revealed in Jesus. Christ is the one in whom God and humanity are brought together for unity and peace. It is good to be reminded how pivotal is prayer to Christian worship and how amazing that God trusts us, standing in church or kneeling at home, to share in his ministry of saving grace for all people.



Jeremiah and the Psalmist both speak of the importance of faith in God being central to the life of the nation – the *pivot* – as our late Queen knew and testified to it in her life, words and times on her knees before her Lord each day.

The prophet Jeremiah was in mourning – grief-stricken over the renegade ways of God’s people – because the Lord was not at the centre of their life.

The psalmist relates how heathen armies have been allowed to invade the land and false religions to desecrate the Temple.

He paints frightful pictures of streets like rivers of blood with the dead laying unburied, similar to scenes we have watched on our news bulletins recently from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Pakistan etc. etc. Jeremiah adds even more painful images with an outpouring of unimaginable grief. *'My heart is sick with sorrow. Throughout the land I hear my people crying, 'The summer is over, the harvest has passed, and there is no change...'*

And the reason? *'The change must start in you! Your nation’s life must pivot around faith in God and your living by the rules of God’s heavenly Kingdom.'*



A rather strange parable of Jesus illustrates an aspect of that. At first sight it may appear to be about a corrupt manager who has cheated his master and is about to be dismissed for his crimes -- and yet gets praised for it!! But it is not! We do not know why he is in this predicament or why as manger he receives praise from his boss! Aware that he is about to lose his job when his books are opened, and knowing that personal poverty is looming, he calls his master’s debtors and reduces their accounts (Maybe thirty percent off their charcoal bills!!). By so doing he plans to gain friends who in return will help secure his future. The master, who may possibly be afraid that the manager’s accounts could reveal his own corruption, praises the manager for astute thinking! Read the story carefully. It will have raised many questions in the minds of the Lord’s hearers, and ours - *Much to think about on a sleepless night!* - but Jesus is making a point about riches in terms of Kingdom living. *It is not how much we have of earthly possessions that counts. It IS about how we use it in Kingdom living – for God and for others!* It’s all part of letting God be the pivot for every part of our everyday living.

We must thank God for Queen Elizabeth who lived by faith under the sign of orb and sceptre, and hear the renewed personal challenge to live under those same tokens of the gracious and victorious King of all kings and queens – Jesus!

A prayer with a nation in mourning in mind [based on Psalm 79]

Lord, my God, with grateful heart I give you thanks
for the life and gracious Christian example of Queen Elizabeth.
I pray for your blessing, health strength and guidance for Charles
our king as he seeks to follow in his mother’s faith-full steps.
Lead us, your people, in your ways of justice, mercy, and grace.
Lord be at the centre of our nation’s life
bringing honour and glory to your name.
Father may your Kingdom come, your will be done in me, in us all.

