

A Christ-centred Life

The Ordinary Sundays of the Liturgical Year (that is those which fall outside a festal season) always begin with the Baptism of the Lord and conclude with Christ the King. Today we begin our journey from the one to the other accompanied throughout the year by Matthew who will be our evangelist. The connections between these two celebrations are emphasised by the choice of the gospels chosen to be read on their respective Sundays. In examining them we can gain a valuable understanding of how our baptism and its significance enlightens the practice of our faith.

The gospel of today gives us the story of Jesus coming to the Jordan to be baptised by John. The encounter is problematic; why would Jesus be in need of a baptism of repentance, hence the rather awkward conversation between the John and Jesus. But I think that hidden in this encounter is a theme which runs a course throughout the gospel, and which ultimately reaches its climax with the story of the separation of the sheep and goats which forms the gospel we read on Christ the King. The theme which I am thinking about is the invitation that we have been given to choose for ourselves to come to Christ.

From the very outset, Jesus comes to stand alongside us and to be with us as part of our human family. He does not remain outside or aloof from our realities, but becomes integral with us. Each of us is given time to come and explore, and this is intimated by Jesus himself when he answers John words. It is as if Jesus wishes us to use our own intellect and our experience of life to inform our faith in order that we see how it answers and meets our needs, our desires and our hopes. This questioning theme underpins the narrative of the gospel as Jesus undertakes his ministry, and it comes to the fore with the central question that our baptism poses for each of us: *and you, who do you say I am?* And whilst our flesh and blood can take us deep into our journey of comprehending the meaning of that question, at some point, faith and revelation makes its request.

Our affirmation of this revelation in our creed is the baptismal foundation of our faith. It is our acceptance of the gift that has been offered and in affirming it, we are challenged to live our lives by it. More profoundly we are asked by Jesus to live out our creed in a particular way, one which places at its foundation the kingship of service and love, as oppose to that of personal gain or wealth. Therefore when we are confronted with inequality and injustice, or when we encounter cruelty and unkindness as exemplified in the hungry and the naked, or in the stranger and the prisoner our choosing Christ, becomes the bedrock of our response. Every situation is thus Christo-centric and calls for us to act in accordance with the gospel values.

The reality of making the gift of Christ present and at work in our lives and thus in the world, is the task we are called upon to do. As we go through our lives and as we listen anew to the gospel each week, we acquire new insights that enable us to discern both how to choose this gift appropriately for ourselves, and how in turn to present it to others, as a meaningful and life changing choice. Our baptism should make us think deeply about why we have said “yes” to God and to our faith, and in that contemplation we experience the Christ who walks amongst us, reaching out to us in love and service, and asking us to do the same.