



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe 2020

The House of Hapsburg ruled swathes of Europe from the Atlantic to the Black Sea. A great dynasty. When a Hapsburg dies his or her body is born in great procession through the streets of Vienna to the Capuchin Franciscan Church. The Friars have care of the Royal Crypt. Thousands of soldiers and baliffs, clerics, prelates, stewards, knights and nobles march the coffin; and then down by torch-light to the doors of crypt. Not open, and brilliantly light; but dark, dusty and shut.

The Herald knocks on the door, and is asked "who demands entry?"

The Herald responds with his name – Franz-Josef, say, ‘His Majesty the Emperor and King’.

The little Friar says through the door, "we do not know him."

So the Herald responds with all the secondary titles ...’Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary; Prince Royal of Hungary and Bohemia, of Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia,

Galicia, Lodomeria, and Illyria; King of Jerusalem, Grand Duke of Tuscany; Duke of Lorraine, of Salzburg... Grand Prince of Transylvania, Margrave of Moravia; Duke of Silesia, Modena, Parma, ... Princely Count of Habsburg and Tyrol,... Prince of Trent and Brixen ...Lord of Trieste...Grand Voivod of Serbia' and these go on for some time.

"We do not know him." Then all the local titles are listed off.

"We do not know him." Comes the stubborn reply to soldiers, baliffs, priests and prelates, clerks, knights and nobles, from this solitary little brown-habited friar through the door.

Only on the third attempt, when the Herald has run out of everything else, when asked 'who demands entry?' does he say: 'Franz-Josef, a mortal, sinful man'.

"So he may come in" is the reply, the doors are opened.

In Jesus all our earthly pomp melts away.

Fr Charles Wesley (buried just a few metres over there) ends his glorious hymn 'Love Divine': 'till we cast our crowns before Him, *lost* in wonder, love and praise'.

Today's glorious feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe places before our eyes as we prepare to

begin another church year (if you can believe it, it's Advent Sunday next week – 2020, what a year?!), anyway, this feast places before our eyes the same truth spoken by our apse. At the end of time, when all is drawn together, we will simply be lost in wonder love and praise – eternal ecstasy, perpetual love, in the embrace of Him for whom every tiny part of the universe has always been destined, in whom we are finally complete, and 'fully know, even as we are fully known' (1 Cor. 13.12), for the first time.

Today, when the world is so fraught and difficult we are reminded that our present reality is not truer than our glorious destiny. Marylebone's own John Lennon wasn't wrong, the road is 'long and winding' (sometimes very tiresomely so!) but at the end of it there is only Him, and all of us with Him. *Thank God.*

The pomp will melt away, and so too the fear and pain and loss and loneliness (Rev 21.4).

It's hard for us to understand, because our earthly kings are all we have to go on. Our earthly happiness, earthly power and justice (so incomplete as they are) are all we have as a measure. But in Jesus we have a different kind of King and different kind of future altogether.

In our Christian family history, we have *so many* examples of people making God out to be a bully like many earthly kings. Or, perhaps latterly, God is a rather impassive and even wet nicey-nice type of thing. We either make God *terrible* or a *pet*.

Today's feast uncovers just how wrong we are. Neither is true. St Matthew (with his typically fiery language for Jesus pulling up the religious scholars) shows us just how wrong we are.

"Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

I love that bit of C S Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia. It seems to me to be more truthful and sensible than years of false teaching, and naff theology.

Look again at today's Gospel. 'You don't play with fire, and you don't play with Jesus' (Fr Eric Simmons CR). He is the King. But this King is no earthy King. This King is the King of the Universe, the logos and the omega – the point, purpose and completion of all that has ever and will ever be; in whom we will at last find true life when His Kingdom comes. Come, let us adore Him.

Come let us adore Him in lives full of prayer, in hearts full of hope of heaven, in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, and in the stranger, the beggar, the one who has little or nothing, the sick and imprisoned. *Our* King is robed in flesh, He has chosen a crown made of hunger, a sceptre formed of *whatever* made Him poor, or got Him put into prison, His palace is a sickbed.

Christ is King, Come let us adore Him where He bids us find Him.