

Feast of Christ the King

Cycle C, 11.24.19

2 Samuel 5:1-3; Colossians 1:12-20;

Luke 23:35-43

THIS DAY... PARADISE

If you're having guests for Thanksgiving, especially house guests who are staying overnight or for a few days, hopefully you won't face the challenges that we saw on screen when King George V and Queen Mary were hosted by the Crawley family in the recent *Downton Abbey* movie. The movie *Downton Abbey* is set in 1927. A royal visit was an honor for any aristocratic family — although an expensive and disruptive one. The king and queen's 4-day visit to Downton has surprising consequences for the residents of the glorious estate — both upstairs and downstairs.



I recently discovered that the premise for the film is based on an actual visit of King George and Queen Mary to an estate called Yorkshire in 1912. King George revived the custom of the “traveling monarch”-- trips

intended to bring the royal family in direct touch with the British people. At parades, tours of farms and mines, dinners and other public events, the people of England got to see and hear their king and queen. King George wanted his people to feel a sense of “ownership of the crown,” to make the monarchy more than just a concept or impersonal institution, but for them to see their monarchs as real flesh-and-blood human beings.



The royal trip that inspired the *Downton Abbey* film was overshadowed by an explosion at a coal mine not far from the estate where the royal couple and their entourage were staying. That mining accident killed nearly 100 people on the second day of the royal couple's visit. King George and Queen Mary immediately went to comfort the injured at the site. That evening, the queen and king arrived at the mine and — much to the amazement of onlookers — they shook the dirty hands of miners who had been recovering bodies all day and night. The town was so grateful that they flocked that evening to Wentworth Woodhouse, where the royal couple was staying. A crowd estimated at some 25,000, including 600 miners, waved torches as a choir sang patriotic songs. The crowd came to absolute quiet as King George began to speak. He thanked them for their presence and his wonderful visit to Yorkshire, and paid tribute again to those killed in the mining accident and their

bereaved families. The crowd cheered mightily in response. That day is said to have changed the protocol for royal visits ever since.



T.M KING GEORGE & QUEEN MARY AT THE COLLIERIES.

For the people of England, the monarchy isn't a relic of a distant past or quaint institution of former times: the king and queen represent the ideal of who they seek to be as a people; the royal family, of course to varying degrees of success, embody the wisdom and strength, the compassion and faith their subjects seek to live. We Americans look to the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution to define us a nation and people — but to the British, perhaps in way that is too idealized, the character of their entire nation is vested in their monarch.

It's that understanding of "kingship" that is at the heart of today's Feast of Christ the King. Our baptism into the life of Christ was and continues to be our proclamation to the world, that the Jesus of the Gospel is Lord of our lives, that we share his vision of the world and seek to fulfill the hope of his kingdom. To claim Christ as King means to make his vision of compassion and justice the measure of our integrity and the compass for our journey through this life to the life of the world to come. Jesus isn't removed from the struggles and burdens of our own lives. In our grief over the loss of someone we love, he brings us consolation. When we are frustrated by our own

weakness and failures, Jesus encourages us to hold on to hope and never give up on starting over and trying again. When anxious or upset he offers us a still point in our turning world. When despairing over the darkness of our world with all its problems, Jesus comes to us as a light to guide our path and move us to take action in healing the world's ills. He came to our world not as an elite but as servant, friend and brother. His love extended to all people without exception or discrimination. His justice was tempered with mercy. His throne is the cross, his crown is made of thorns and his power is the persuasive force of love. Not a military hero or a political victor, but a servant and a shepherd who leads us to God's kingdom.



In baptism we take on the work of establishing God's rule of justice, love, compassion and peace in our midst. We struggle to make Jesus' promise of Paradise a reality here and now. Inspired by Jesus' humility, may we embrace the spirit of justice, integrity and humility in his cross and proclaim the truth revealed in the gospel: humble service to all who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. May we both receive and share the never-failing hope of Easter resurrection over Calvary's cross. May our union with Christ in the Word and in the Eucharist allow us to share in "ownership of the crown."

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