



Homily
Feast of Christ the King 2008

Archbishop Patrick Kelly

I wonder if after hearing me this morning the Lord Lieutenant of her Majesty the Queen might decide I should be sent to the Tower; but if that should happen I trust the Lord Mayor will lead a petition from Liverpool to plead for a royal pardon. But we'll take the risk. After all it is a sort of special day for me.

On one occasion, it is said, the Queen Mother and the Queen arrived together in the same car. As the door was opened the Queen Mother was heard saying to the Queen: "Who do you think you are?" To which the Queen is alleged to have replied: The Queen, Mummy, the Queen."

Now that is the question we may put to Jesus giving that description of how all nations will be judged. Who do you think you are? And we will see that the same question is put to us by that same story: Who do you think you are?

First of all: that very well-known story, often quoted to demand care for the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the sick, the stranger, the prisoner. There is one feature in the story that some would find a scandal. Why is it worse to neglect the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the stranger, the prisoner, because when we do it we do it to Jesus? Is it not bad enough that we do it to them? Who does Jesus think he is by teaching: the judgment will be more searching because you did it to me? And his answer: the King, my friend, the King: I am the Lord.

And only that fact explains Liverpool's skyline: two Cathedrals: Liverpool Cathedral of Christ and the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, joined by a street called hope. Our skyline proclaims for all to see: One Lord of All. One judge to whom we must give an account of our priorities, our choices, our attitudes, our actions.

But the question: Who do you think you are?, is addressed to us by our Lord's description of what the final judgement will be like. Notice carefully what he said: all nations will be gathered into his presence: everyone. Then we notice: in the Gospels and in the rest of the New Testament, the word brothers does not mean everyone; it means: those Baptism has made children of God and brothers and sisters of our Lord; and that unity with our Lord is renewed over and over again by receiving his Body and Blood. All nations will be judged by the way they treat us, disciples of the Lord. Who, then, do we think we are? One Body, one Spirit in Christ: we will never apply to ourselves that ridiculous statement: after all we're only human: we're not. It's a daring thing to be seen entering into one of our Cathedrals willing to accept what the buildings say. You are born again of water and the Holy Spirit, the family of God, guests at the Table of Jesus, with hearts where the Holy Spirit has chosen to dwell.

And the messages in the visitors' book in the Sister Cathedrals make it clear: very few are able to come and be just a tourist. Beauty speaks, silence speaks, images speak and many find life is deeper and new peace is found.

But there is a warning in Our Lord's words today: it seems he is suggesting: those who invite me into their life, will not always find pleasure in abundance: my brothers and sisters will find they are so determined to give to others, that they have less to eat and drink, less creature comforts at home. As they refuse to be silent in the face of injustice they will become strangers to some who once were friends, no longer welcome. It is good to recall the words of Dom Helder Camara, the Bishop of Recife in Brazil on the consequences of taking seriously not just the facts, but the causes too of hunger, thirst, homelessness: "When I feed the hungry, they call me saint; when I ask why they are hungry, they call me a communist." His brother Bishop Oscar Romero for asking questions and being a voice for the voiceless in San Salvador was assassinated as he celebrated Mass, and many of those who were willing to walk his way were shot during his funeral.

But today proclaims: "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." The King of Love, his kingdom of justice and love and peace, of holiness and truth shall prevail shall prevail: in the end it is so obvious: no one in their right heart and mind could say: but I would prefer a kingdom of injustice, hatred, war, of evil and lies. If they do they need to be healed, reconciled with the one who is God and with each other. That Reconciliation accomplished by the shedding of his blood which our red window proclaims.

It is obvious: the yes to Jesus is yes to life: we cannot but rise again. The choice of evil is foolish, it is to choose sadness and weariness: it is to prefer darkness to life. But from across Europe and Africa, as a fitting contribution to Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture, from this city that once entered into the terrible darkness of the slave trade, this is our united song: We are walking, in the light.