

Christ the King, Matins,

24th November 2024.

Father Tim

On Thursday St Mary Abbots held a service for a man who died early in life, it was a sad occasion as David had a young family. As well as being sad, there was celebration and gratitude for a good Dad, husband and friend. Within the service there was also gratitude shown from his work colleague's, who specifically talked and paid tribute about David at work. Within this sacred space we heard about David's life in dealing with things like VAT and project management. It struck me because, as we gather for services and particularly on a Sunday, the weekend, the rest period, we don't often hear about the world of work.

You may come here and wish to keep Monday morning at bay or for those who are retired you may wish to simply move on from the world of work and not have to think about it much more. Or I suspect that clergy are often at fault for not mentioning work, as this is our work, we can get wrapped up in what goes on here, without considering what goes on out there. This divide is sometimes referred to as the sacred and the secular.

At the funeral on Thursday, it was a reminder to me, that not only do we need to hear more about what work and what it means for Christians but also that it can be viewed as good not just a means to an end. Today the church Celebrates Christ the King. A celebration which is recently established. The catholic church established it in 1925. It was seen as a response to secularism. Of seeing this divide between sacred and secular. That Christ is not only King here, this morning at a religious service, or even when you are home privately, but Christ is King tomorrow morning when you sit at a desk, go into a shop, take a walk in a park, go into the Dentist office.

Pope Pius XI remarked ' *"It would be a grave error... to say that Christ has no authority whatever in civil affairs, since, by virtue of the absolute empire over all creatures committed to him by the Father, all things are in his power."* This authority in all affairs is illustrated in Jesus feeding the 5000. Jesus is not limiting himself to certain spaces. Of course, the idea of secular and sacred doesn't exist, but still, he is not confined to say a temple, Christ's Kingdom is manifest, embodied away from dedicated places of worship.

The question for us this morning, is how we can thrive in our Christian faith, not only within this space, but also to see the good in our activity outside and be secure in the knowledge that Christ is King in all affairs. But perhaps you don't fancy that. You'd rather have things divided up. maybe it's more neat. This is my spiritual space and beyond this I must get into a different sense of self.

It's easy to fall into this divide. Which is more about the philosophy of secularism rather than reflecting on the interplay between secular and sacred and Christ's Kingship in both.

When we enter the work space tomorrow or when we go the dentist, there can be a suspicion that we are in a neutral space. We all agree to not show our colours. We don't do God, as one famous podcaster once said. We see these spaces as neutral rather than mutual. Modern secular philosophy has suggests religion is irrational or a form of fantasy and should be left behind and move from magical or mythical thinking to a reality that is free from religion. Secularisation identifies with modernisation in that it seen it as inevitable that religion would lose its significance

with the progress of industry and technology, we can hear that in the conversation around the 'Godlike' role of AI.

This framing sees the secular work place as a neutral rather than mutual and does not accommodate the numerous accounts of meaning and purpose, whether religious or not, that make up complex societies. Although this present in our work and public places and culture at large Brethetron '*modernity did not slay religion*'. It has created a space in post Christendom where religion has become an option among many and secularism has come to be seen as too simplistic. It does not give weight to the complexity of different beliefs in society and how over time there is an ebb and flow of religious significance over time and space.

For example, the Soviet Union repressed religion and imagined a non-religious future but following its collapse religion plays a significant role again in the political life of Russia. Church attendance may be down in the West but is growing in South American and Asia. Church attendance was higher in 1950 in the United States than it was in 1850. The modern progressive view of secular neutrality while still influential is increasingly seen to be simplistic.

As you gather in spaces after Church today, when you're maybe at the pub or in the cinema or work tomorrow you may feel this pull of neutrality, of having to keep something back but you may also sense that there is more to this space than mere uniform neutrality. That the sacred and the secular are not as easily demarcated. That Church is not the only place where Jesus reigns.

That you're work tomorrow is not something to be escaped but something God says should be good and wants to play a part in no matter how difficult, humdrum or unrewarding. Working is part of leading our lives well. We don't just work for the sake of working, we work to create. We work to accomplish something, it doesn't have to be paid, it could be cleaning the home, cooking, caring for someone or at college. We can enjoy work itself, and not just for the results. It is an expression of our humanity. Who God has called us to be. It is part of our flourishing. It is not divorced from your life as a Christian. This is all takes place under Christ's reign as King in all areas of our lives.

Within this Christ asks us to participate in his Kingdom here and also out there.

This Kingdom is the fundamental aim of human existence and the deepest longing of human hearts, and we don't leave it behind at the door. We should let it determine the character of our lives, to show compassion to those we encounter in all place we find ourselves, as Christ kingdom was expressed in the feeding of the 5000, the Kingdom was embodied in the care shown for others.

So may we live well this week and embody that Kingdom in all places we go and all people who we will meet

Amen

