

Authority

The year has undeniably been an eventful one so far. We only have to think of the EU Referendum in this country and the Presidential election in the United States. In both cases the result was not quite what was expected, even among the eventual winner. I am sure we have our own views on these two events. However, what both appear to have brought to the surface is a disillusionment amongst a number of people in both countries in the existing political establishment. For some people at least this was a protest vote, an opportunity to challenge the powers that be.

There are those I imagine in most countries who feel that their voice is not heard. They feel disenfranchised with no influence over decisions made by central government. They feel neglected and ignored by politicians whom they see as only interested in their votes. They may well see their conditions getting worse rather than better.

I suppose there has always been an ambivalent attitude towards authority. At least in our countries gone are the days of rulers with absolute power who ruled by what they believed to be divine right. Yet even in western democracies power is still in the hands of a relatively small of people – and not just politicians. We think, for instance, of the influence and power of global corporations.

Yet in many parts of the world power is still held absolutely by a small elite. Any opposition or challenge to their authority is met with a strong arm: imprisonment, torture, even death. We have only to think of the current situation in Syria. And those of us who write letters on behalf of Amnesty International hear of some truly terrible cases of injustice.

Down the centuries the Church has tended to side with civil powers and authorities, though not always. The martyrdom of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral is a reminder that the Church does sometimes have to maintain its own stance.

The last few weeks of the Church's year form now in our Anglican tradition a kingdom season, culminating this coming Sunday in the feast of Christ the King. Through the Gospels Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God is not the same as earthly kingdoms and forms of power. This comes to a head in Jesus' trial before Pilate and we heard just now the interchange between Jesus and the Roman governor about our Lord's kingship.

Out Lord is King, yes. But his palace is an exposed hill, and his throne a common criminal's cross. The idea of kingship, or rule, or authority is almost turned upside down. It is not about dominating others, about imposing one's own will on others. God's kingdom is instead one of absolute justice, of constant faithfulness and total reliability, of compassion, of mercy, and above all of love. That is the message we proclaim. That is the faith we profess.

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