

## **Christ the King'24**

Last week I did 2 assemblies on the boy king of the East Angles and a homily too, at our Thursday mass. You can see a summary of his life at the back of church near the millennium tapestry.

I speak of King Edmund, our most local of saints and when we get his flag for our tower, you will see his simple emblem of a crown pierced by two arrows, a symbol of his martyrdom. You will all know the legend that his dead body was protected by a wolf, hence on the green of our Cathedral church in Bury St Edmunds, you can spot a wolf close by his fabulous statue by Dame Elizabeth Frink. The vast abbey built by King Canute was a busy place of medieval pilgrimage where people came to pray at his shrine. He was, the Patron Saint of England well before anyone had heard of St George.

In neither school could I find a child named after Edmund, but I did have a crown for the eldest child at the Prep and St Mary's schools...which they seemed to enjoy. Like so many kingly saints, however sketchy the details of their lives, they like to know the gory details of how they died. My own 'birthday' saint was St Lawrence, deacon and martyr, who was toasted by flames of fire. I don't know if that has anything to do with why, by association, I like marmite...that's one for the psychologist's chair!

Today, at the end of our liturgical year, we remember and give thanks for another man 'born to be king' but again, one who suffered an agonising death, and whose crown of thorns was

a sign of mockery by Pilate and a sign of failure. Jesus is uncomfortable with his interrogation. He is not only accused of being just another poor criminal. He is challenged as someone who had fantasies of being King of the Jews, something Jesus neither assented to nor, denied. 'My kingdom is not from this world.' There's the biggest clue we have of how his influence and authority and 'voice' would indeed echo through the centuries up to the present time.

Our own generation sees in the teachings and sacrifice of Christ's earthly life, how we can begin to discover for ourselves, the heavenly life: the kingdom of God which has no end.

Thanks to a recent conversation with Alison who knows the priest-poet, Malcolm Guite, I have explored some more of his verse. One of the 'antiphons' as they are called, 'Rex Gentium' (King of the Nations) falls on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent. And this is his 'take', his own composition:

*"O king of our desire whom we despise... (From 'Sounding the Seasons' p.12)*

Dear sisters and brothers I just cannot improve on this deep reflection or meaning for today's feast, at a time when our own Church of England is very vulnerable right now; and at a time when world security and peace is so vulnerable. This 'arrow prayer' surely speaks to the 'now' of our longing for a new Christian season to begin. A new season for renewed hope in God's purposes and direction, as we pray:

*"Come to us now and find in us your throne."*

AMEN.