

CHRIST THE KING ©

Today feels a bit like filling up our bins with lots of different leaves, before emptying them for a new and wintry Season ahead.

Today, and in this Diocese particularly, it is the feast of St Edmund the Martyr; you may recall he was the only English sovereign until the time of King Charles 1st to die for religious beliefs as well as the defence of his throne.

Traditionally, it is 'stir up Sunday' when you begin making those Christmas puddings for the Rector's Market stall next Saturday! Today is also the end of our liturgical 'Year C' before we return next week to 'Year A' readings and prayers for Advent Sunday. And those of you (most of you) will have received an important message with your E-News from Jeremy Hawksley, our Safeguarding Officer, that it is 'Safeguarding Sunday' and in the Church of England, we still have so much to put right to make things better: in our care and protection for children and vulnerable adults. Please read, mark and learn how we can re-train ourselves as well as reach out to all victims of abuse whose wounds remain unhealed.

The most important leaf and theme for today is to recognize and to worship Christ as our King, the one who suffered on the cross, and forgave the penitent thief – who is also known as the good thief, or St Dismas. Poignantly, he ask Jesus to remember him, to which the Lord replies: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Even the Cross, especially the cross, can be the source of conversion from darkness to light, from repentance to forgiveness, from suffering to glory. That's why, in many Christian traditions, the conversion of Dismas on the cross represents the steps towards salvation: awareness of sin, repentance, acceptance of Jesus, and the promise of eternal life.

The writer and theologian Frederick Buechner said: “To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn’t already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. **When** you confess them, they become the... bridge.” In our public confession a short while ago, we acknowledged our weaknesses and failings, our wrongdoing – in thought, word and deed – and we repented of them. This is a key part of salvation for us, as it was for Dismas. On the cross, Dismas bridges the gap between himself and Christ, and in those short moments he confesses, repents and is saved. What faith – and what a reward!

So often we think of Kingship as a life of privilege, or strength and power, or luxury. But actually today teaches us that the kingship of Christ is like no other, and that it is never too late for us to confess, repent and be saved; it is never too late to change direction because we are never broken beyond repair. We can be assured that Christ with his crown **of thorns** – our servant King – suffers alongside us. No matter what we have done, or neglected to do, or for how long we have done or not done it, if we make peace as Dismas did, Jesus will hear our heartfelt confession and welcome us into the kingdom.

Quite how we share this good news within a society that puts ‘I’m a celebrity, get me out of Here’ on nearly every News channel, I just don’t know! When quizzed by his paid jungle mates, ‘What will happen to Liz Truss?’ Matt Hancock quickly replied, “She’s finished” – and he didn’t seem at all worried by the irony of such a statement! So-called ‘celebrities’ seem to put competitions on a pedestal where there are simply winners and losers, but when they are politicians as well, something has gone horribly wrong. The Gospel is surely teaching us the need for meaning and truth, for integrity and humility which Christ can and does freely give us whenever we listen to Him, instead of so much hype - that forgiveness comes cheaply.

