

St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham
Annual Civic Mass
on the Solemnity of Christ the King
Saturday 20th November 2021

Celebrant and Homilist: Rt Rev David Evans,
Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham

Daniel was an interpreter of dreams, who also *had* dreams. His dreams were not so much wishful thinking, though they might seem like nightmares sometimes; instead, they were points of entry into the realm of God where the rise and fall earthly empires were regulated according to the will of God, until the time came for what Daniel saw in visions was revealed to all humanity.

Daniel was given access to an eternal kingdom where God exercises sovereignty through the compassion that he shows to the oppressed people of the world.

John, the author of the Apocalypse, was given access to the same world. His dreams were sometimes as terrifying as Daniel's; but he knew something that Daniel did not – that the one on whom kingship was conferred was Jesus of Nazareth, truly Son of God and son of humanity, who had borne witness to this truth when he was on trial for his life in front of Pontius Pilate.

This seemed the more important reality for John and the bedrock for any dreams for itself and its future that humanity may have. Alongside it is the truth that in spite of the splendour of God's kingdom, its delegated sovereign is a defeated criminal, and a plain victim: *everyone will see him, even those who pierced him and all the nations of the earth will mourn over him.* This is a ruler who came *not to be served but to serve.*

We listened to a fragment of the trial of this upstart usurper from John's Gospel. It is a part of a struggle of wits and words in which Pilate is almost won over but who remains on the side of Caesar rather than Jesus because he realised that to be king in God's kingdom he would have to surrender his authority and even his identity to a Galilean nobody, from Nazareth, whence nothing good ever came.

Pilate's dreams were only ever earthbound. Their consequences were nightmares for those who suffered them. Yet it was Jesus whom Pilate had declared innocent who died on the cross and who will appear in glory when the time is right, as Daniel saw.

These months of COVID and pandemic have been a season of bad dreams, but hope is beginning to dawn and people are starting to dream joyfully again. Pope Francis has asked the Church to dream about who she is and what she has been called to be. You who are

gathered here have a part to play in the dream of humanity, which is to make the blessed and beautiful realm of this world ever more like the realm of God: the peace of honest government, justice, unity in civil life and religion, education for all, work which provides enough to live on, security of housing, safety on the streets, freedom from anxiety, an ever better world for our children.

The foundation of our dreams is the compassion of God who did not spare his own Son but gave him up to benefit us all. This compassion is the foundation of dreams because it is the reality at the heart of them all. What is real in God's realm is to be real in our own – the aim of all who serve in public life.