

Accession HM Queen 2011

Psalm 121, Joshua 1 vv 1-9, Revelation 21 v22 – 22 v4, Isaiah 58 vv 1-12, I Corinthians 2 vv 1-12, Matthew 5 vv 13-20

Constitutional monarchy is the British answer to two conundrums. The first of these is the problem that, on the one hand, we cannot live with anarchy. We need law and order. Witness Somalia. On the other hand, however, power corrupts. Witness, for example, Zimbabwe. So, in order to avoid anarchy we have to entrust people with power, but we also have to face the fact that the people to whom we entrust power are likely to become corrupted by it. The British answer is constitutional monarchy. We accord our Queen all the loyalty and respect and the trappings of power which go with being head of state and we entrust actual power to parliament, which we can vote out of office, and to the law which is answerable both to a democratically elected authority and to certain higher universal principles of justice, about which more later.

The other conundrum is how to maintain unity without enforcing uniformity? We value a society in which people hold and express very varied political views. It would be a denial of their human rights if people were persecuted for disagreeing with the government. Society would be unable to progress if it silenced the voices of the dissident and the dissenter. But how do you maintain the unity of a society in which people hold differing or even opposing views about the economy or welfare or health care or the need for military intervention? How do you keep on board the socialists, communists, UKIP supporters, Scottish Nationalists and the rest when you have a Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition government? Our British answer is that our loyalty and the loyalty of our soldiers, judges, police and clergy, etc., is to the Queen, not to the party in government.

The monarch is a symbol which unites our nation and a focus for the exercise of power, which effectively denies power to those who might be corrupted by it. To that extent, the British monarchy functions like the American flag. Our symbol of power is, however, a human being and therefore deserves a different kind of devotion to that accorded to a flag. There is a personal loyalty to the Queen which there cannot be to an embroidered rectangle of cloth.

In Britain, the monarchy is very closely connected with the Church. The coronation is a Communion Service and the Queen is presented with a Bible as the source of her inspiration. We have this accession service potentially every year. The Queen is prayed for in our services. She is supreme governor of the Church of England and no heir to the throne may hold a religious allegiance which would make that rôle impossible to fulfil. All this comes under examination in the light of the secularisation of our society and of multi-culturalism. Ought the United Kingdom to have a Christian constitution and Christian laws now that many of the Queen's subjects are members of other faiths and what seems like a majority of British citizens are indifferent or even hostile to any kind of religion at all?

Two thoughts about that. If not from God, where would we get our values from? On what would our laws be based if they were not based on moral absolutes such as justice and mercy, and where do these moral absolutes come from if not from God? If God, then God is the origin of everything, the origin of all laws, whether the Laws of Gravity and of

Thermodynamics or of the Ten Commandments. If you cannot run an airline without regard to the Law of Gravity, neither can you run a country without regard to the Law of Justice, Mercy, Love and Peace.

I am not saying that Christianity should be enforced by law in Britain. Neither am saying that members of other faiths and atheists and agnostics are not entitled to be treated with respect and included in the national debate about what our laws and values are and should be. I am, however, saying that we Christians have not just the right but the duty to stand up for Christian values not only within the Church or only in our home life but in every aspect of our national life: social policy, health, welfare, public morality, the justice system, war and peace, foreign policy. You name it; it's of concern to God and therefore of concern to us as Christian people.

And finally the power of prayer. St Paul tells us to pray for our rulers – and not just the Christian ones. Leadership and the exercise of authority are heavy burdens and, whether they know it or not, all rulers need God's help, which is graciously bestowed in answer to prayer as it is in so many other ways.

Ultimately human society has to be lived out in the context of eternity. One day the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Our national life now, today, ought to reflect that future reality. Our Revelation reading gave us a vision of heaven when our prayer *thy kingdom come, thy will be done* is finally and completely answered. Joshua told the man of God that his vocation was to lead his people in accomplishing God's purposes and that God would give him the gifts he needed. Isaiah pointed out that a truly religious society would be just and merciful. In the Gospel Jesus explained to us Christians our vocation to illuminate and to transform the world. St Paul spoke about the way the world's wisdom, the world's way of accomplishing anything, is so different from the Christian way made manifest in Jesus Christ, the way of self-sacrificial love. Psalm 121 showed us where we can find the resources to live our lives and to do our bit.

We celebrate our Queen's 59 years on the throne. They have been good years for Britain and we are very blessed in the person of our head of state. As we do so, we remember our Christian vocation to uphold our country in prayer and by bearing witness to the Truth in Christ which illuminates and transforms every area of our national life and of the life of every nation under Heaven.