Christ the King A 2011 (read only)

Like me I’m sure you will remember a rather boisterous childhood game called King of the Castle. It was a simple and rather brutal game in which someone would claim a piece of raised ground from where they would call out a beautifully poetic insult as a challenge for others to depose them: “I’m the king of the castle, get down you dirty rascal.”

Games like this rely on an image of kingship based on superiority. The king is physically higher than the challengers who are further belittled by being called dirty rascals. Keeping the title and position of king requires brute strength, cunning and belittling the opposition; and I don’t remember there being any rules against skulduggery or cheating.

21st century monarchs may no longer employ the same tactics as their ancestors but history shows that the basics of the game reflect the reality that kingship emerged from the exercise of brute force and cunning with callous disregard for those who posed a threat. By the same rules weak monarchs were always vulnerable. Monarchy was born of a dog eat dog mentality.

How utterly different is the Kingship of Christ. Today’s reading from Book of the prophet Ezekiel imagines God as a conscientious shepherd whose concern extends to every sheep in the flock. Unlike the child on the mound the shepherd uses their vantage point to look out for the welfare of the flock. The shepherd’s task is not to defend himself but to defend the sheep and to search out the lost.

The revised wording of our Eucharistic Prayers draws our attention to the fact that we are co-heirs with Christ. This means that we don’t have to depose Christ to gain our inheritance. We assume our inheritance by doing what he does, by seeing the needs of others through God’s eyes. We may be sheep in the fold but we are also called to share responsibility for the welfare of others.

Like the shepherd we are called upon to assume a particular vantage point. Like the shepherd we are to use our eyes not for our own advantage but to protect the vulnerable and look after the needy and those lost in the darkness and mists of life.

The beauty of this calling is that those who follow the example of the Shepherd King are oblivious to the significance of their kindness and simply get on with it. Today’s parable brings this into very sharp focus. We are given a timely reminder that every active response to the needs of others ushers in God’s kingdom.