

Why did Pope Paul VI give away the triple tiara ?

There may still be Irish Catholics for whom the spirit of this feast is best expressed by the pomp and ceremony of a papal mass. The raised

platform with the altar, and upon the platform the raised dais with the pope's throne, the triple tiara, the resplendent Swiss guardsmen, the hushed congregation packed with diplomats, businessmen and politicians - a fitting tribute to Christ the King ?

Paul VI gave away the triple tiara, and chose to be buried in the plain wood coffin of a pauper, in order to express - in a world with a growing social conscience - the nature of Christ's kingship. For it is not in people prostrating themselves before a throne, but in people leaving their thrones to come down among those poorer and weaker than themselves, that we can glimpse the lordship and rule that Christ exercises. "The least among you all, that is the one who is great," (Lk 9,48) "The person who humbles her/himself will be exalted," (Lk 14,11) "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20,28) "I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet" (Jn 13,14)

Pope John Paul has been the centre of some great television spectacles - masses with a million or more people in attendance, an entire nation catching its breath. These elaborate liturgies undoubtedly touch the hearts of thousands. But he would be the first to say that it is when he greets the poor in each country, revering in them the special presence of Christ, that then he is most modeling the kingship of Christ. In this sense, one of the most 'regal' acts of Pope John Paul was when he took off his ring during a visit to a Brazilian shantytown and gave it for the people.

The Church, then, rich in its knowledge of its Master, chooses Mt 25, 31 - 46 as the central scripture reading for the celebration of Christ's kingship. The setting is royal : "the Son of Man ... in his glory, escorted by all his angels, seated on the throne of his glory." He is looking for an account of stewardship from every human being, from those whom he entrusted with life in this world. The homage that he is looking for, the evidence that the rule he entrusted to his subjects was wisely exercised in his absence, is stunningly simple : "I was hungry and you gave me food ... in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

There is such hunger and want in Ireland today. Hunger for work, thirst for a future that would make it worth staying off drugs ; people stripped of their dignity by a society which values its members by how much they can earn rather than because of who they are ; people sick with worry over the constant struggle to keep their family fed, warm and housed ; people imprisoned within ghettos of high unemployment

and vicious circles of poverty. Let us pray,
on November 22nd, that every aspect of Irish
life - but especially our labour market and
social welfare policies - might have their
doors thrown open to the kingship of Christ,
