

Eternal God, in whose perfect realm no sword is drawn but the sword of justice, and no strength known but the strength of love: so guide and inspire the work of all who seek your kingdom that peoples and nations may find their security in that love which casts out fear and in the fellowship revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

[Prayer from the Society of St Francis]

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Notes.

1. Gian Carlo Menotti NBC Opera Company 1952
2. Michael Leunig, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/michael-leunig-returns-with-curly-world-a-call-for-an-end-to-all-the-madness-20160725-gqd4bt.html>
3. Hymn for Christ the King. Martin E Leckebusch, Royal School of Church Music 2015

For further reading on today's scriptures:

http://www.textweek.com/mkjnacts/jn18_19.htm

The Feast of Christ the King is a good opportunity to pray for those who have leadership responsibilities in today's world:

We lift up our hearts, O Lord, in intercession for all who carry the responsibility of leadership. Grant that, putting aside all merely selfish ambition, they may seek to be the instruments of your will and carry out your purpose for the welfare of your people; and may they both seek and see your glory in happier human lives. Amen.

In the Opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*¹, Amahl's mother is caught stealing the gold belonging to the Three Wise Men. This is the gold they are bringing as a gift for the Christchild. She tries to steal it out of concern for her son Amahl and his future. He has a disability and uses a crutch to walk. Like many parents in this situation, she worries about Amahl's future after her death. Seeing Amahl and understanding the motive for the attempted theft, King Melchior says she can keep the gold. According to him, "The Holy Child will not need earthly power or wealth to build his Kingdom". In the song, *Oh woman, you can keep that gold*, Melchior sings,

*The child we seek doesn't need our gold
on love, love alone, he will build his kingdom.
His pierced hand will hold no sceptre,
his hal-oed head will wear no crown.
His might will not be built on your toil.*

Next Sunday is Advent Sunday and we'll begin our liturgical and spiritual journey of waiting and preparing for the fulfilment of God's promise—the Birth of Christ. With the Magi and the Shepherds and others who went to find him, we are surprised by the way this kingdom breaks into our world, through a vulnerable child and in a stable.



It startles and surprises us. It goes against our expectations. It's not about *being great*, it's about *serving*. It's not about *earthly power and military might*, it's about gentleness, *compassion and love*. His might is not built on our toil.

Today's Gospel (John 18:33-37) is taken from John's account of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. Here, in response to Pilate's question "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus states (v.36), "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were from this world my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here". I don't think Pilate ever really understood the kind of kingdom Jesus was speaking about. It was way

outside his experience, value system and frame of reference.

On the other hand, I'm pretty sure Pilate would recognise many aspects of today's world: might built on the toil of the oppressed. He would be mystified by the IT and other features of modern life, but he would recognise and probably admire the domination by military might used by dictatorships to hold onto power and suppress opposition, such as we see in North Korea. He would recognise institutions that control and dominate by means of economic and political power, such as multinational corporations that dominate and exploit and manipulate market economies for economic gain alone.

These are the kingdoms of today that Pilate would recognise pretty easily. Systems, or kingdoms, that are meant to serve the people and improve their lives but which end up the masters of all by controlling and manipulating. Our world is full of injustices and inequalities, many of which have been engineered to ensure the good of a few. The work of poet and artist Michael Leunig² reminds me that we live in the midst of a crazy, mixed-up world of contradictions and opposing values. A world that we struggle to make sense of much of the time.



The Night We Lost Our Marbles by Michael Leunig.

Yet as Christians, we are called to see the good that can and does exist in today's world. At the same time we are called to challenge the control and dominance that we see. To work for a world where systems, be they military, economic or political, actually serve the greater good of the people. To strive for a world where all human ingenuity, economic, social and scientific, is deployed not for individual gain but for the common good. In Christian terms, to live out kingdom values of justice, peace and dignity to enable human flourishing.

The Old Testament (Daniel 7:9-14) and New Testament (Revelation 1:4b-8)

readings today are apocryphal material. They serve as a warning that Jesus Christ, who led a gentle, self-giving human life, is also the Alpha and the Omega, the eternal one, "the one who was and is and who is to come", Christ the King who we celebrate today. He sits in judgement of this world and its human institutions. Let's prepare to take seriously four themes of Advent over the coming weeks: Hope, Peace, Love and Joy. Let's explore how we can make these more of a reality in our own lives and communities.

Pontius Pilate might have had trouble understanding the kind of Kingship or Kingdom of which Jesus was speaking but in the Opera that I mentioned earlier, the character Amahl and his mother did not.

Amahl's mother says she has waited her whole life for such a King (i.e. one who will not need to oppress or exploit others in order to build a kingdom). She asks the Magi to take back the gold she has attempted to steal. If the Christchild didn't need it, she wouldn't need it either. The disabled boy, Amahl, wants to send a gift to this new born child, but he has nothing to give. So he sends his only possession—his crutch—as a gift. On offering this gift to the Magi, his leg is healed. He ends his journey by accompanying the Magi to visit the newborn King, offering his crutch as a thank offering for being healed.

Another name for this Sunday (which we call Christ the King) is Reign of Christ Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the Christian or Liturgical Year. We finish on a high note, as it were, remembering that despite the inadequacies and injustices of our world, Christ reigns supreme over all things. This is as it will be at the end of time—Christ will reign as Alpha and Omega. Like Amahl, may we stand before this King, when he comes, offering our gift of thanksgiving, adoration and praise. As the new hymn³ commissioned for Christ the King Sunday proclaims, let us:

Tell all the world: the Lord is King;
with newly-written songs declare
the awesome greatness of our God,
whose glory no-one else can share.

Proclaim his splendour round the world,
from mountain-top and desert sand;
and let the voice of praise be heard
from every town, in every land.