

Reflection from Fr. Colm on the feast of Christ the king

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Hi everybody, today we celebrate the feast of a monarch and my oh my no shortage of talking points and indeed controversy surrounding the television series *The Crown*, I won't go into that other than to say that we're celebrating a different type of crown, the Christ the king today, it's leading us into Advent and indeed Christmas so we're getting a hint of what kind of service that this king born into the Jewish people is going to be but let me give you an example of service. Service that perhaps this is of someone who took very seriously what today meant and indeed what Christmas meant, what indeed the entire Christian message meant.

Nick Beacock died on the 8th October he was 79, he died in Newcastle. I'm sure many of you have not heard of him, however, Nick Beacock has changed the lives for better of hundreds of people especially the marginalised and in particular the homeless. Today there are eleven crisis UK centres throughout the country and indeed even those in rented accommodation have much to thank Nick Beacock for. His roots are in Yorkshire, born in Bridlington, when he left school he went to work in the local steelworks and from there he came up to Durham to study theology and then after ordination, sorry in between ordination and Durham he went to Lincoln theological college and after ordination, he was appointed as curate in St Barnabas Church, East London when in 1967 he was asked to be the first chair of the charity Crisis. This immediately propelled him into the further needs of the homeless and the poorly housed began to get a connection here which was to be hugely important and formative for him. Nick's reach out in fact was so extraordinary in so many areas of life that the chair of the mental health charity Mind described Nick Beacock as having few rivals in the voluntary sector. However, perhaps his greatest achievement was forcing through lobbying the local councils to legally house the homeless in priority need and so for the past 40 years, Nick Beacock continued his commitment to the poor.

I mention him because I am hugely impressed when I read of someone like that and also I think in covid, lockdown and irregular news updates have focused us on issues that perhaps didn't receive too much attention before covid. We are certainly more aware of mental challenges and the level of poverty that was in fact growing prior to covid. This has been

accentuated now with large scale close downs. Unemployment is now on the up. and so, in tandem with this however we are also seeing an extraordinary sense of care, a greater sense of solidarity that may well not have been there before covid. Unfortunately because of the more national challenges, we may not have had the time to think of those living beyond our shores and I'm thinking especially of those in very poor countries. And this brings me back to an initiative ten years ago by the British government which has been in many ways both the envy and the admiration of so many in the world in which .7% of the GDP which is approximately 7 pence in every ten pounds goes to aid the world's poor. It enhances the reputation of this country worldwide however because of the financial squeeze due to covid, a tragedy looms whereby this aid may be withdrawn. The case for not doing so is huge particularly the reputation and damage it might cause this country. Writing recently Bob Geldof, who's so involved in Live Aid, and I mean his own work to the poor in other countries, doesn't need me to add to it, however, he did say in relation to the possible withdrawal of funding to aid poorer countries, he said it could really mean pulling a needle from a sick child's arm and grabbing the meagre crust off the plate or indeed sacking a teacher in a tin shack somewhere around the globe.

So there you have it we have a reminder of individuals who have pushed the boat out with regard to reaching beyond ourselves and reaching beyond these shores but let me take you back now to the first reading today which is from that wonderful prophet Ezekiel who reminds us that *"The Lord says this: I am going to look after my flock myself and keep all of it in view. As a shepherd keeps all his flock in view when he stands up in the middle of his scattered sheep. I will make the weak strong. I will watch over the fat and healthy. I shall be a true shepherd to them."* What's marvellous about that reading from Isaiah is he's not differentiating between those who have and those who don't in fact he's clearly stating that all of us are under the guiding care and loving gaze of a very wonderful protective shepherd and it's because of that perhaps that we need to be taking our responsibilities, because we are loved, because we are fortunate to reach beyond us. Obviously, Ezekiel is reminding us of God's love for us all and so let us on this day, this great feast of Christ the king, remember the purpose of service and pray for those in need and particularly over these coming weeks that our sense of priorities will always be there. God Bless.