

## Feast of Christ the King, and Aotearoa Sunday

As you sit in your pew, look up at the Te Deum Window above the High Altar. There, seated on a throne and surrounded by angels and saints, is Christ in glory. The image is based on the 4<sup>th</sup> century psalm *Te Deum Laudamus* (We praise you, O God) and is full of symbols representing concepts of ultimate power and glory as traditionally understood when the window was installed in 1930. Human images such as the throne, the imperial crown, and the orb of power are familiar to us because they are still part of a traditional British coronation. The rainbow as a symbol of mercy, and the scales as a symbol of justice, are universally recognised.

Surrounding Christ are the cherubim (in red), which signify love, and the seraphim (blue) for intelligence. Below them on the left are the Virgin Mary, in blue, and St Joseph, in green. Then comes the dove of the Holy Spirit, and a row of saints, martyrs and prophets, led by Peter, James and John, the three central figures in red. The bottom row represents a range of saints, bishops, musicians, poets and theologians, including Handel, Palestrina, and Milton. On this Aotearoa Day, we can be glad to see Bishop Selwyn and Samuel Marsden represented. What an inspiring heritage we are heir to!

But ... Symbols are powerful, but dateable. Roman concepts of supreme imperial power transferred to the institutional church by and after Constantine were still acceptable in 1930, but no longer. Controversial images represent a sincere desire to express the inexpressible glory of God, but in the language of their time. Meanwhile, the imagery in front of us seems to be a direct contradiction of Jesus's own words: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them.... But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves". Luke 22: 25-26.

One solution is to make a clear distinction between *now* and *then*. Jesus commands us to work *now* as he did, to use the soft power of love and acceptance among the poor and lowly. By contrast, the window represents an understandably inadequate vision of our *future* worship in heaven among the fully redeemed. Don't despair of getting there: as Archdeacon Cowrie (a previous vicar here) said, "Praise and worship are the best antidote to despondency".

Kim King