

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 399 Almighty Father, who dost give

Reading: Mark 15. 16-20

Prayers:

This afternoon, on the steps of The Capitol a forty seven year old man will walk out to take the oath as President of the United States.

Barack Obama is an African American, a relative newcomer to the murky world of American politics, becoming President of the USA at a time when the world faces immediate and great challenges.

He comes to power after what seems to many of us to have been the wasted years of his predecessor, a man who seemed to lack a grasp of the great issues of the day and to often act inappropriately to the challenges he chose to confront.

When Barack Obama returns to the White House he will hear for the first of many times the traditional musical greeting, "Hail to the Chief".

2,000 years ago another man was hailed as the leader of his people by the soldiers who shouted at Jesus, "Hail King of the Jews".

The difference, of course, is that whilst the band plays in homage to a democratically elected leader the soldiers shout in mockery at a man that they see as an upstart and troublemaker.

Yet, today, we may ponder the links between these two men as we celebrate the life and death and resurrection of the one we call "Lord" and pray for the man who carries on his shoulder the weight of the world's hopes and longings.

First, Barack Obama is a committed Christian.

We Brits tend to be cynical about American religiosity and sometimes with good reason. There are forms of the American Christianity which seem to have more to do with the culture of America than with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Yet, we often forget that for millions of Americans, and Barack Obama amongst them, their Christian faith is power within their lives which shapes their attitudes for good and gives them the strength to put into practice what they believe.

Barack Obama is not just a nominal Christian, nor is he a prisoner of a particular Christian tradition. When we pray for him we pray for a brother who seeks to put faith into action.

Secondly, Barack Obama sees the God given value of every human being

There are many reasons why Jesus stood in that lonely place of humiliation as the soldiers mocked him with the purple cloak, the crown of thorns, the beatings around the head, the shouting and the spitting.

Yet, perhaps as much as anything what infuriated the religious of his own day was the value he gave to those who were looked down on as sinners. Whether they were the poor breaking the religious law to scrape together enough to live on, the women who he treated with respect and care even when accused of serious sexual offences, or the rich traitor who Jesus visited in his own home, all were regarded as of value.

Translating this belief into practice will not be easy for Barack Obama whether it is in the world of Afghanistan and Gaza or amongst the poor in his own country.

Translating vision into policy and action is one of the hardest things for any leader to do. Yet, we are praying today that he may do just that, recognising that he will also fail to achieve all that he sets out to do.

We pray, nevertheless, that what he believes may shape the future of our planet.

Finally, we pray that he may be open to the wisdom of Christ

High office with its panoply of polite officials can easily make a person believe that no one matters more than he or she. Yet, we may pray that Barack Obama will in humility be open to the wisdom and love that is to be found in the man who is mocked before Pilate's soldiers.

For in him is the love and wisdom of God made visible, our guide as we seek to serve him on earth and our strength in all the difficulties and challenges we face.

What we pray for Barack Obama we pray also for ourselves. May we seek God's will for us and our world day by day; act justly and out of care for all his daughters and sons and find in him our hope and help in success and danger.

Amen.