

It took a long time after he first moved here for Wei to stop being a tourist. Even now, eleven years after taking up residence in the UK and eight years experiencing the increasingly dubious benefits of being a British citizen, there is still a part of him for whom this is all exotic and exciting, the natives, quaint and picturesque. You never thought you were that did you. In my chosen there is a deep streak of the sightseer embedded in that suave exterior: had one the eyes to see the clues were there right from the start with his choice of venue for a first date; it was Harrods after all. Any excuse it'll be off to see this, or going to see that or why don't we visit this. And let me tell you, nothing, but nothing, is more attractive to the tourist mind in England than royalty. It's the holy grail of visitor list: nothing could be more exciting to the inveterate sightseer than hanging around the gates of Buckingham Palace, shuffling through the bourgeoisie monstrosity of Sandringham or spending the day in the sink hole of Berkshire, known to the locals as Windsor. Odd, I know. Defenders of the monarchy will often point out how much tourist money the institution brings into the country and I can attest that at least 50 per cent of it over the last decade must have come from Taipei. Naturally, no tourist worth the moniker can visit anywhere without visiting a gift shop, so about a year after we tied the knot, the vicarage at Barkingside contained an almost complete range of union jack ware- tea towels, plates, cups, cushions, door stops, bunting, wall hangings, throws- you name it, if it didn't move quick enough it had the UK flag on it. Home was a bit like living in one of those souvenir shops in Leicester Square. So many union sigils were there were there that even Nigel Farage would have felt a bit queasy had he popped round for a cup of tea- even before the effects of me cursing him non stop for an hour set in, which is of course, what would happen should that frog-faced demagogue ever come within shouting distance of your Rector. Through a process of attrition and judicious 'we must have lost it when we moved house' I've managed to whittle it down to one union jack door stop. I feel less nervous in my own home now. And at least has Wei never got into the Commemorative Royal Porcelain thing, so I haven't had the experience of finishing my dinner only to find Prince Philip's face, resentfully staring back at me through a blob of leftover sauce.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. There was a point during the interminable, demeaning- and expensive- process of obtaining a spousal visa- when I explained to Wei what it meant for the Church of England to be the established church- who said romance was dead? and he did ask- and his response to the fascinating digression wasn't what yours would be - yawn- but more along the lines of OMG! That means you work for the Queen! The QUEEN! The Queen is your boss! OMG!

It's quite possible that was a deal sealer rather than my wit and lively eyebrows, and when Wei boarded the plane from Taipei all those years ago he thought he was flying off into a life of royal receptions, tea at Buckingham Palace, and hobnobbing with the gentry. The reality of course has been far better— there's nothing drearier than rich people after all— and though ten years on the periphery of the Church of England, and he still hasn't met its supreme head and governor, well he can console himself that he's certainly met quite a few drama queens along the way.

So, what is it about the Queen, the princes and princesses, Dukes and Duchesses that can get even the best of us weak at the knees, rolling over onto our backs and reaching for the purse to purchase some overpriced plastic tat?

In the long and distant genesis of the institution, the monarchy was all about force; violence is a crude but unmistakeable way of winning the argument— but as time has gone on and Kings have wanted to pass their kingdoms on to their children rather than the chancer with the biggest sword, there has grown a mystique around the monarchy— that they are somehow different to the rest of us, set apart and set above. Royalty breathe a more rarified air, they move in elevated circles, their pedigrees are perfection: indeed, the blood in their veins is a different colour. It's not the law of the jungle, it's divine right. Even before Henry VIII decided the English church was his personal play thing, the belief was strong that kings (and there were only kings before that psychopath's equally psychopathic daughter) were appointed by God. With a line you can trace back through Charlemagne to the Emperors of Rome the fingerprints of the church are all over the English monarchy. Our Kings and Queens are crowned with St Edward's Crown, anointed with Holy Oil in a baffling variety of places by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in a church service that rivals only the installation of a new Rector in its bladder-busting length and brain-cell terminating tediousness. All those people who bought a TV set to watch the coronation must have been wondering why they wasted their money by the end of it, but they would have been in no doubt that something pretty special, holy even, had taken place.

Even now when we're much, much less likely to think of special things in terms of holiness, schooled on fairy tales and Disney fables we still think that royalty is somehow different: more hard working, more polite, more dedicated, more rarified, better behaved, with better morals; and who is to say that is not the case? We bow and curtsy and scrape and highness and ma'am in their presence. In a nutshell, even without the imprimatur of the church, we still behave as though Royalty is not the same as the rest of us.

And that's the way we want it. We don't *want* our monarchs to be just like us. After all, what's the point in that? If we want people just like us, we look in the mirror. If we want to see people worse than us we log on to Twitter. Sometimes we want to see someone better than us, someone who is above it all, someone we can believe knows which is the oyster fork, who looks natural in diamonds and ermine and can sit in a gold clad fairy tale carriage without looking completely ridiculous.

Hence, why this day of Christ the King is so difficult. Because, because. Well, just look at him.

Now there are many lies churches tell you, and many of those lies are made even before anyone opens their mouths, and the crucifix is one of the most egregious. Usually Jesus looks pretty serene on the cross, which is a colossal misrepresentation of the agonies of crucifixion; but by far the biggest fib is that modesty-preserving piece of cloth covering his loins. People were not crucified with dignity. The Roman state was not concerned with the modesty of a condemned criminal. Humiliation was part of the deal. No fig leaf was provided to cover the embarrassment.

Here is Christ the King on the cross, and the king has no clothes. And breaking the golden rule of royalty, for all intents and purposes, for all to see, he is *just like us*. There is absolutely no mystique. He bleeds red blood, he suffers, he sweats, he thirsts, he cries out. Those are just the details fit to print— the reality of crucifixion is repulsive and much, much more graphic. And then, finally he dies.

What happens when the King dies? Someone else becomes king. The King is Dead! Long live the King! But that doesn't happen here. When we set aside a Sunday of the year and call it Christ the King, we need to be aware that we are not talking the sort of king that lives in the palace, and we need to be careful. Christ the King is something very different from Henry the King, or Edward the King or Elizabeth the Queen. We can't see King Christ as we might King Henry: different from the rest of us, set apart, set above, in elevated circles, breathing rarified air.

The majesty, the dignity, the pomp, the elevation, the magnificence, the stateliness, the nobleness of our human thrones is like the Emperor's new clothes of Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale: they exist only in our imaginations, webs of fancy woven from a heady mix of fantasy and need, memory and desire, distraction and power: in a word, lies. Whereas the royalty of Christ is woven of truth.

“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth”

What is essential for us to understand about Christ the King is that if we say he is the king above all kings, king of kings and Lord of Lords that doesn't mean he is like all eight Henrys rolled into one, pumped up on steroids and turbo-charged, monarchy-max. Christ the King is *just like us* and that is what makes him King, for as Christ ascends into the heavens to take his throne, it is his humanity that is raised to those ineffable heights. Christ the King is *just like us* and that is what makes him King,

Look again at our king at his birth.

Poor. Homeless. Helpless. Hunted.

Just like us.

Look again at our king on the Cross.

Naked. Powerless. Suffering. Humiliated. Degraded. Bleeding. Dying. Dead.

Just like us.

Look at our king now. Ascended into Heaven. Raised to the right hand of the Father. Resplendent in glory.

But still with the marks of the nails in his hands, and the wound in his side.

Just like us.