

Christ the King: Jesus, Our King

In the second half of the last century, Catholics took a deep look at their faith and at the meaning of being Christian Catholics. The Church was suffering from those who emphasized the Divinity of Christ to such a degree that His Presence was seen as too great for the ordinary person to tolerate. This was really a heresy. It removed the possibility for a person to have a personal relationship with the Lord. That is not in keeping with Scripture, where Jesus calls His disciples and us His friends.

When the Church looked at this during the second half of the last century, it realized the importance of people recognizing their personal relationship with the Lord. We were told, rightly so, that Jesus is a loving caring friend. And this is great. We should have an active and open communication with the Lord. We should have an active and open prayer life.

But this way of thinking can also be taken to an extreme. Jesus is not just our friend. He is also our King. There is a difference, a huge difference. Here's one way of considering it: We allow a friend to ride shotgun. We give our King the keys to our car. We do not just consult with Jesus. We follow Jesus. We give Him our lives. We let Him direct us.

When we hear the word "king" we often think of the splendor of Versailles of Louis XIV of France, or the Russian court of Catherine the Great, or even the modern British court. The thought of these monarchs invokes scenes of lavish banquets, with plates of gold and silver flasks. We also think of absolute despotism.

This is certainly not the type of king presented in today's readings. The first reading from the *Second Book of Samuel*, presents the people of Israel asking David to be their King. They ask David to shepherd them. This reading is presented to tell us that Jesus' reign is in the spirit of His ancestor, King David. David was one of the people. He was a shepherd who was given the kingdom due to his ability to fight the enemies of his people. Jesus is one of the people. He is chosen to be King because the people need a shepherd to lead them. Jesus was the one who, like David, was able to defeat the enemies of Israel, the forces of evil. Like David, Jesus was anointed to serve the People of God.

In the second reading, from the *Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, Jesus' kingship is presented in mystic terminology. Jesus is the image of the invisible God through whom all things, visible and invisible were created. All are subject to Him. He is the Head of the Church. All spiritual powers and temporal powers were created through Him and for Him. Most important He is the Reconciler of everything on heaven and on earth. He is the Redeemer, the One who sets the world back on the course of giving glory to God. He is the forgiver of sins. This reading ends by saying that Jesus has used His Power to bring God's peace to the earth, through the Blood of the Cross.

Then we come to today's Gospel, the scene is Calvary. Jesus is abandoned by

his people. Only Mary, John and Mary Magdalene and perhaps a few others are there. The rest of the Twelve, the huge crowds that had pressed so hard on the Lord forcing Him to do things like preach from a boat off the shore, the crowds are gone. Where were all these people? Surely they heard of His arrest, his trial before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. Certainly, by now they had heard how the Temple leaders had filled the Roman courtyard with scoundrels demanding Jesus' death. Where were they all? Had they decided that Jesus could not lead them? Yet, it is on the cross that Jesus is proclaimed to be a King. And this was really not by the Romans who placed a sarcastic sign over his head, "This is the King of the Jews." On the cross, Jesus was proclaimed to be a King by one of the criminals who was dying with him. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Why would this man whom we call Dismis call Jesus a King? What did Dismis realize that so many others had blocked out of their lives? Dismis had to realize that Jesus possessed the Power of the Spiritual, the Power of God. Jesus demonstrated this power when he turned to the repentant criminal and said, "This day you will be with me in Paradise."

He is our King. His Kingdom is, as today's Preface, the prayer we say immediately before we sing the Holy Holy, tells us, is a Kingdom of truth and life, a Kingdom of holiness and grace, a Kingdom of justice, love and peace.

We have given the keys of our lives to our King. We have now been called to imitate him at his most regal moment: reigning on the Cross sacrificing himself for others, reconciling, forgiving. We are called to realize with our lives the Kingdom of truth and life, holiness, grace, justice, love and peace.

We ask Christ today to help us to sacrifice as he sacrificed. Sacrifice is noble. It is also no fun. All of us literally run out of gas, giving to those who are continually demanding. We all want to say, "Enough is enough, let the children take care of themselves, the older folks find their own solutions to problems arising from their limited abilities. The married among us often want to say, "My spouse is demanding too much." But there was no limit to Christ's sacrifice. There is no limit to the extent He wants us to follow Him.

Perhaps the greatest sacrifice we are called to make is the sacrifice of forgiving those who have hurt us. On the cross Jesus forgave those who conspired against Him to kill Him. He forgave the soldiers who brutalized Him. He forgave His disciples who deserted Him. He forgave us. He saw our sins, your sins and mine, and embraced the cross to restore grace, not just for the world in general, but for you and me. It is harder to say "You are forgiven" than it is to say, "I am sorry." But that is the way of the King on the cross forgiving the criminal, the mockers, His executioners, forgiving us. Forgiveness is the way of the Kingdom.

We are called to be members of a Kingdom of Truth. Jesus told Pilate that he came to give testimony to the truth. Pilate sarcastically asked, "What is truth?" So also do some people of our day who are faced with the realization that a life of materialism is empty and an illusion. Some have become cynics saying that there is no truth in the

world. Others have decided that truth is relative. Truth is whatever they decide it is. If that is so, then there is no truth.

No, Jesus Christ said that there is truth. He is the King of truth. So what is this Truth? What is the basic truth of the world? What is the fundamental truth that Jesus proclaimed? The Truth of Jesus Christ is that there is infinitely more to our existence than the physical. The Truth of Jesus Christ is that his Kingdom is worth infinitely more than all the riches of the world. The truth of Jesus Christ is that living for personal gratification is taking a dive into an empty pool. Yes there is truth. And we stand for the truth and with Jesus.

If we do this, when we do this, if and when we stand for the Truth of Christ, we are set apart from others. And that is what holiness is, to be set apart for God. Therefore the Kingdom of Truth is a Kingdom of Holiness.

It is also the Kingdom of justice and love. For truth demands that we protect the rights of all. We, the Church, cannot and will not ignore the plight of the poor, the sick, the mentally and physically challenged, those who are abused by the system, the battered wife, the helpless baby--inside or outside the mother, the scorned migrant, and all the lepers of the modern world. As followers of Jesus Christ we are committed to His Kingdom of Justice and Love.

The Church year is over. Like the conclusion of a good book, the final chapter sums up the essence of the book. The Solemnity of Christ the King sums up the Church year by proclaiming: Jesus is the central mystery of our faith. He lived, He died, He rose, and He will come again. He went about preaching about the Kingdom of God and encouraging us to change our lives so we can become members of this Kingdom. He told us to avoid the materialism of the world. He called us friends, and brothers and sisters. He called us His own. He told us to keep His presence alive in the world by bringing His compassion to others. He allowed us to be called Christians.

May we have the courage to be faithful members of His Kingdom.