

Christ the King “The King Who Elects His People”

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In the Gospel today, Pilate asks Jesus “Are you the King of the Jews?” It is a sarcastic question because the religious leaders in Jerusalem handed Jesus over to Pilate for crucifixion. Jesus answers, “My kingdom does not belong to this world.” This much seems clear. After all, this king was born in a stable. Kings typically are not carpenters. We don’t imagine Kings of Jesus’ day and age going out of their way to help beggars, lepers, prostitutes, blind people, and people possessed by demons like Jesus did. And kings are rarely sentenced to death. Jesus is a very atypical King. The only throne he claimed for himself on this earth was the cross for the sake of our salvation. It is therefore quite understandable that Jesus says, “My Kingdom does not belong to this world.”

We Americans of course are very uneasy with talk about a King, and for good reason. Our country started with a revolution against a King. When George Washington was given the opportunity to be named King of America, he wisely rejected that notion, and gracefully stepped down from the presidency after his terms were fulfilled. Americans have good reason to be distrustful of royalty and aristocracies. A government that is represented by elected officials is more to our liking. We like electing our officials, and when they do not serve our needs anymore, we elect someone else. It is therefore understandable that we might be uneasy with the idea of Christ as King.

The Bible, however, says one thing loud and clear. If it were up to us, we wouldn’t elect God to be our King. The one thing that is consistent in the Old Testament is the Chosen People’s habit of breaking God’s covenants right and left throughout history. The kings in the Old Testament were also not exactly the shiniest examples of human virtue either. It seems like every king fails in their relationship with God, one way or another. And when we are given the option of electing the Son of God as our King, the people elected for his death instead. Ironically, God used this rejection as the very means for our salvation. The witness of the Gospel is quite simply this: it is not we who elect Jesus Christ as our King. It is Christ the King who elects us to participate in his everlasting life, if we just accept his lordship over our lives.

What does this lordship look like? Ask the blind man who regained his sight. Ask the woman caught in adultery. Ask Peter and Paul and the other disciples. Ask the women who traveled with Jesus even to the foot of the cross. Ask the countless men and women, whose infirmities were healed by his loving hands. Ask Mary and Martha. Ask Lazarus. Ask our Blessed Mother. Ask the saints through all the ages. Ask the martyrs who died defending the faith. Ask the saints who are living and working today around the world and right here at Saint Teresa of Calcutta Parish. Ask the members of your families whose faith has been an inspiration to you. Ask the loved ones we are remembering at our shrines this month. Look in the mirror now and ask yourself what does Jesus’ lordship look like for you?

With everything going on in the Church and world today, from my perspective, sometimes being a faithful disciple of Jesus simply means going back to the basics. Our relationship with Jesus begins with prayer. From our prayer follows charity to the other people in our lives. And from our love of God and neighbor comes a sense of justice that we work for in our world and in our circle of influence. It also looks like working to better ourselves, each and every day, becoming more Christ-like in our love of God and neighbor, especially the most vulnerable. I have also personally found that the best recipe to healing and joy in life begins with accepting that our lives are really not about “me”, but rather about Jesus. It is a grace to finally realize that we never “chose” God to be in our lives. God chose us to be in his life when he gave us his only Son and sacramentally called us to be his Son to the world by the measure of our discipleship, to be the change this world needs to see.

And so Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you a king?” Jesus answers Pilate, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And so, as we end this liturgical year and move into Advent next week, do we dare turn our hearts completely to Jesus? Do we dare to accept Jesus as Lord and King? Will we work for a better world around us in the measure we love God, family and neighbor? When we do these things we embrace our vocation and spiritual birthright as citizens of a heavenly Kingdom, led by example by our savior and Lord who was never an elected official. Jesus elected us.