

Christ the King Sunday, 20 November 2022

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 5:1-3; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading from the Old Testament, all the tribes of Israel together choose David and anointed him as their king.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he writes that all things were created through Christ. God's plan is for all things to be reconciled through him so that we may take our place in heaven, the kingdom of the Son whom God loves.

In the Gospel, Luke narrates the moment when at the crucifixion the good thief recognizes Jesus as the King of the Jews, and, in turn, is promised a place with him in heaven.

This weekend, the Sunday before Advent begins, has traditionally been celebrated as the solemnity of Christ the King.

Apart from the pre-colonial days under King George, our nation as an independent country since 1776, has never had a king. That very notion is foreign to our history and our life, even as we peer across the pond to our foreign colleagues at the recent installation of the new King Charles.

Other Gospel readings also proclaimed on this day in alternative years actually suggest that such a feast not be celebrated as such.

Let us go back in time. Historians remind us that attaching such a royal title to the historical Jesus would have certainly brought about his death. The first-century people in occupied Palestine, to

whom Jesus directed his ministry, were restricted by law to have only one king (or Caesar): the Roman emperor. Anyone else who dared to assume this title was not only an imposter; he would be immediately condemned to crucifixion for high treason. In those parts of the four Passion narratives in which Pilate questions Jesus about his kingship, Jesus as the Galilean carpenter, either denies it, or tells Caesar's representative he better find a new definition for the term. If Jesus is a king, he is totally different from the kings of his day and age.

Parts of that new definition can be found in the historical environment of the first reading. In Judaism's earliest day, Jewish kings were, by definition, expected to be different from their Gentile counter parts.

Under intense military pressure from the Philistines, the 11th century B.C. Israelites began to realize they needed more than "judges", who just responded to individual crises. They needed leaders who would be always only duty. Following a prolonged debate over the positive and the negative arguments about kingship (1 Samuel 8), Samuel, the last judge, with Yahweh's begrudging permission, gave in and anointed Saul the first Jewish king. David would become the second. Though Saul never united all the 12 tribes of Israel, David did so.

As a Jewish king, David was expected to "shepherd" his people, not lord it over them. He was to make the people, not himself, the center of his reign, to be an outward sign of Yahweh's care and concern, the champion of the helpless, the voice of the voiceless. Every Jewish king was especially expected to make himself available to widows, orphans, and resident aliens.

Jesus' early followers were also convinced that God's care and concern for the helpless was demonstrated through the death and

resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Their conviction is clearly stated in the famous “hymn” that is at the center of the second reading. The Pauline disciple responsible for Colossians employs it to remind his readers about what lies at the heart of their faith: “God delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins”. Once our sins are forgiven, we stand before God on the same level with the greatest saints of heaven. Just as David united all Jews, Jesus unites all people. “For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven”. As Paul frequently stated, we all become the body of Christ.

We need to recognize the contrast in the Gospel between the type of king the Jewish “rulers” were expecting the Messiah to be, and the kind of leader Jesus actually was and is. Prompted by the Roman inscription nailed above the crucified Jesus’ head, his enemies logically taunt him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” Real kings, they believed, take care of themselves first.

Luke’s Jesus responds by instinctively taking care of someone else. “Jesus”, the criminal crucified next to him pleads, “remember me when you come into your kingdom”.

This completely different king responds: “Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”.

It is interesting to note also that only Luke’s Jesus encounters a good thief. One of the reasons Luke introduces this particular person—beyond his overriding interest to present Jesus as innocent—revolves around his constant concern to show Jesus to

be a person for others. No matter the pain Jesus is suffering, he is always concerned for others' pain.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus is depicted as worrying about what will happen to the women who mourn his crucifixion, and Luke has Jesus look sympathetically at Peter, after Peter denies Jesus three times. No other evangelist has Jesus restore the severed ear of the soldier in the garden.

No matter what the title the early Christians gave to Jesus, they were confident they were dealing with someone who always focused on them, not on himself. Referring to him as king forced them to look at leadership from a different perspective, especially Christian leadership.

It is essential to know what Christ the King is all about, since we should be about the same things.

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