

Solemnity of Christ the King - C

When we think of a king, we usually think of someone with great power, prestige, and wealth. He is often honored and revered. People seek his favor. He lives in a castle and wears fine clothing. He is at the pinnacle of his society.

Of course, there aren't a whole lot of kings around anymore in general. But we do have our own modern-day version. While they are not like the medieval kings that we are familiar with from history or as portrayed in movies, etc., they do share many characteristics with them. Perhaps they are the celebrities of entertainment, sports, and politics. They have money and they have fame. And they probably have even more influence over us than the kings of the past had over their subjects. We admire their appearance, their wealth, their lifestyles, their influence. Consciously or subconsciously, we seek to be like them. For

example, celebrities get all kinds of free clothing, free cars, free gadgets because the makers of those things know that they are an incredible marketing tool. Just by wearing or using or driving their products, marketing agencies know that others will be prompted to buy these things.

In reality, then, every culture and society and nation have their kings. The Jewish people made David their king after Saul's death. They looked back on the reign of David as the glory days of the Jewish nation. Under King David, the tribes of Israel were united and became a strong nation. For once in its history, they were not dominated and subjugated by other nations. But after David and his son Solomon, the nation of Israel began to unravel. The country became divided into two kingdoms and over the centuries was conquered again and again; its people suffered violence and exile at the hands of other nations. To this day they seek the return of their former greatness.

So the Jews desired another king who would come and unite them and subjugate their foes. In the midst of centuries of suffering, the Lord sent prophets to them who promised the coming of a Messiah, another David. And that is what they were expecting when Jesus Christ was born into the world. But Jesus was not the Messiah, the great King, they were looking for. Jesus came in an extraordinarily unexpected and unlikely way.

Today we celebrate the final Sunday of Ordinary Time, which always concludes with the Solemnity of Christ the King. It is interesting that the Gospel today, in which we celebrate Christ's kingship, is of Jesus on the Cross. He has been whipped and forced to carry the cross to the place of his execution. He has been nailed to the cross, and is being mocked and jeered at by both soldiers and passersby as he dies on the cross. He has none of the things that are associated with our earthly kings. No money: he has been

stripped of everything. No prestige: he is cursed and reviled by the religious leaders, soldiers, passersby, even by one of the thieves crucified alongside him. No power: he has been condemned to death and nailed to the cross to die. He is not admired or honored: almost all of his followers have abandoned him. Only his mother and Mary Magdalene and the apostle John remain at the foot of the Cross. This is our king.

Human history has been marked by sin. We have all been wounded by others who have sinned against us and we in turn have wounded others with our sins. This plays out at all levels of our society. Violence begets violence. People seek to get revenge or get even for the offenses committed against them. The wounds that we have received in the past often manifest themselves in how we treat others. How often the abused becomes the abuser!

Jesus breaks this cycle of sin and revenge. Although sinless and unworthy of punishment, he suffered the worst of punishments – unfairly accused and put to death as a common criminal, although he had committed no crime. And in freely suffering death at the hands of the very human beings he created, not only did he not seek any kind of revenge – although alone among human beings he would have been justified in doing so – but he also redeemed us from our sins. Jesus allowed himself to be debased and disfigured for our sake, so that we might be glorified.

This is what a heavenly and not an earthly king does. He lays down his life so that we might have life. And in giving us the promise of eternal life, he promises to fulfill our deepest desires and longings. As human beings, we are literally never satisfied. We constantly long for more. Every meal, no matter how delicious and how filling and satisfying, never satisfies us completely. Sooner or later we will be hungry again. No possession, no matter

how expensive or beautiful or technologically advanced, will be enough to make us never desire other possessions. No relationship, no matter how happy it might make us in a given moment, will satisfy our every desire forever. There will always be times when we feel lonely or dissatisfied or empty or unfulfilled. We will always desire more.

And that is what Jesus promises us – more. Infinitely more than we know or have ever experienced. The fulfillment of all our desires. By dying on the cross for us so that we might have eternal life, he makes this possible. By lowering himself, he seeks to lift us up. That is what a heavenly king does. He does not seek earthly glory, power, pleasure, or prestige, nor did he die on the cross so that we might have those things, because he knows that none of those things will ultimately satisfy us. He knows that receiving glory in this life can never truly satisfy us; only eternal glory can.

So as we prepare to enter into the season of Advent, which culminates in the celebration of the birth of Jesus, we remember Jesus' death on the cross for us. It is this that gives us reason to hope, that the words Jesus spoke to the good thief on the cross will be for us as well: "Behold, you will be with me in paradise."

- **November 23, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**