

## **Christ the King – Year C (Nov. 25, 2007)**

Often on this Feast of Christ the King the preacher begins by telling the congregation how difficult it is for us to get excited about kings or to have any meaningful concept of them in our lives. But I'm not so sure that that's true. Even though we haven't had a king in these parts since 1776 and kings have not figured in our political experience, there is still an extraordinary fascination with royalty. Just consider all the attention we pay to the British royal family.

In *America* magazine this week, Father John Donohue begins his comments on today's readings this way:

Ask a group of Boomers who pops into their heads when they hear the word king. Some candidates might be simply "the King" (Elvis) or the King of Pop, or, more soberly, some might remember "the Boss" singing: "Poor man wanna be rich/ Rich man wanna be King/ And a King ain't satisfied/ Till he rules everything."

"King" suggests someone at the top, exercising power and receiving adulation from all quarters. Even today when kingship seems out of kilter with modern culture, as I write these lines the tragic and troubled land of Afghanistan may place its hopes for peace on an aging king.

Well we call Christ our king, but certainly not in any of the senses I have just recounted. So what does it mean for us today to call Christ our king?

Fortunately our readings today are a big help.

Beginning with the first reading from the Second Book of Samuel we learn what it means for Christ to be our king. We are told that all the people came to David and said to him, "Here we are, we are bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. We are your people. Be our shepherd king. We place ourselves in your hands to care for us as a shepherd cares for his flock. We are you own flesh and blood." In David's time the king was responsible for his people. If anything was wrong it was up to him to set it right. David became a figure of the Messiah. When the Messiah came, the people thought, he will be a king like David.

Well, David was the king of the Jews – and when Jesus was crucified,

the Roman authorities put a sign on the cross saying this was the king of the Jews. They wrote that obviously in derision and mockery. They had no idea what it meant for Jesus to be king. Perhaps the one who comes closest to it is the thief who is dying beside him and who says, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Now this man knows that his time on earth is fast coming to a close and the same is true for Jesus. So somehow he intuits that there is more to life and more to reality than what he has experienced. Somehow he knows that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, but it is real all the same. In desperation at the moment of death he calls out to Jesus, "Help me." And Jesus in his own weakest moment, when he feels the fragility of his and our humanity, as he is dying, says, "This day you will be with me in Paradise."

It seems to me that this tells us a great deal about what it means for Jesus to be king. When they hung him on that cross, Luke tells us that his first words were, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." Now his dying words to the thief are also words of forgiveness. That's the kind of king that Jesus is: a forgiving king. That's what he came to do and in a very real sense that's why he died on the cross: to let us know that our God is a forgiving God, who loves us very, very much, a God who so loved the world that he gave his only son for the life of the world.

The letter to the Colossians, our second reading, elaborates on this notion of a forgiving king and takes it much, much farther, perhaps I should say much higher, because there Jesus becomes a cosmic king. The author tells us first of all that God, our Father "rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Through him we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins." But then as if this were not great enough, he goes on to say: "In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or principalities or powers; all were created through him, all were created for him. . . . It is he who is the head of the body, the church; he who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead. . . . It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him, and by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, everything, I say, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross." It's the cosmic Christ. It's a magnificent passage. Go home and get out your Bibles and

read it, over and over, pray it, ponder it. And ask God to help you understand what it means in your life.

Let me tell you for just a couple of minutes now just what these readings and the whole idea of Christ as king mean to me. Maybe you might find some of the same meaning in your life.

First of all, remember that what we do here, we do in the context of this Eucharistic celebration. Now in this Eucharist we will receive the Body and Blood of Jesus and by the natural processes by which we assimilate all food, the Body and Blood of Jesus will become our body and blood. We become bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh – and like those people in the first reading, we come to him and say, “We are yours. Be our king and let us be your people.” Now belonging to the Lord as his people and sharing his own flesh and blood, means that in some way we are extensions of his own person. The flesh and blood of Jesus are our flesh and blood. Now this means that in some way we must be like Jesus. We must be able to do the things that he did. At the heart of his ministry was reconciliation, forgiveness. Compassion was not secondary in Christ’s life. It was the way he exercised his kingship.

Today’s world has so many examples of cruelty, harshness, the desire for vengeance, to exact an eye for an eye. I am forced to ask myself in the light of this Gospel, how can one be a disciple of Christ the king and have any question about the inadmissibility of the death penalty. In a scene of execution, Jesus, dying himself, wants only to bring pardon and hope. What is the most appropriate way for me to react?

Then there is the cosmic Christ. We think all too little of the sacredness of the world and its redemption. But there is a sacred stamp on every part of creation, on snow-capped mountains, on gushing rivers, on every majestic oak. Created by God and reconciled by God in Christ our king we can, as one poet put it, “see his blood upon the rose.” What are the consequences of this? Well, certainly one of them is that environmental concerns are far more than political issues. They should really spring from faith. There are those who argue that we are already well on the way to the destruction of the planet. Not just our faith but even common sense tells us that the tide has to be reversed if our sinfulness is not to deprive our children and their children of their planetary inheritance. The cosmic

Christ must give us pause. And once again I must ask myself, “Where am I in all of this?” What do you ask yourselves? That’s what the Feast of Christ the King means to me.