

Deacon Mike's Sermon for November 20 2016

There was a wealthy king who was quite sincere about religious matters and questions.

One night, the king was awakened by a fearful stomping on the roof above his bed.

Alarmed he shouted, "Who's there?"

"A friend," came the reply. "I've lost my camel."

The king, angered by such a ridiculous statement, screamed, "You fool! Are you looking for a camel on the roof?"

"You fool!" the voice answered. "Are you looking for God while you wear silk pajamas and lie in a bed made of gold?"

These simple words, we are told, filled the king with terror, and he rose from his sleep to eventually become a very great saint.

You too are called to become a saint and live eternally in the heavenly kingdom celebrating the Kings of Kings, Jesus Christ.

Most people may not realize it, but the feast we celebrate this Sunday, the Feast of Christ the King, is a very new one on the Church calendar.

It was added by Pope Pius XI in 1925. He created this feast as a reaction against the prevailing attitudes of his day – a way to refute the growing threats of communism and secularism.

These two "isms" sought to make man, not God, the most powerful force in the world. Within a few years, of course, the world would have another "ism" to confront, Nazism – making this feast even more significant.

A century later, those threats have been replaced by others that tend to marginalize God—"isms" like materialism, relativism, and narcissism.

But here and now, this feast still stands in defiance of our culture. And it stands before us as a challenge.

It asks us: "Who – or WHAT — really rules our lives?" That's a question we could spend all of Advent asking ourselves, and praying over. And maybe we should.

We aren't called to storm the shopping centers screaming for bargains. We're called to storm the heavenly kingdom with our prayers.

This kingdom doesn't have a castle or a court.

It isn't a place of royal fanfare. It isn't even found on a map.

It is a kingdom that dwells within the human heart.

And its great defining landmark...is the crucifix.

That is where we encounter Christ the King in today's gospel reading. In fact, this reading may hit us as a shock.

Usually, we hear this gospel during Holy Week.

But on this feast, when we celebrate Christ's triumphant presence in the world, we don't meet this all-powerful King in a moment of splendor.

We meet Him most humbled — and most humiliated, stripped naked, beaten, dying on a cross.

Yet, this is part of what we pray for when we pray "Thy kingdom come."

We pray for a kingdom of peace and justice, of course.

But we also pray for a kingdom of sacrificial love — a place where the greatest honor isn't in how much you have or how much you control...but in how much you give up.

His kingdom is where true power lies...in being powerless.

It is a place where we are called to love, and to give, until there is nothing left.

It is where pure love reigns. And it is in that kingdom where the "good thief" wants to dwell.

This exchange has a unique place in all of scripture. In this passage, Christ isn't called "rabbi" or "teacher."

In the last moments of his life, someone finally calls Him, simply "Jesus."

It is the only moment in the gospels where this happens: this is the only time that someone calls him by his given name.

The man hanging beside our Lord speaks to Him as a brother, as a friend.

He talks to him, literally, man to man.

"Jesus," he says to Him, "remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Those words, passed down through history, have become our words — the plea of anyone who has ever felt abandoned, or lonely, desperate or afraid.

We pray that God doesn't forget us. And that He will give us, somehow, His grace.

And Jesus answers that simple prayer: "Today, you will be with me in paradise." The kingdom will come.

One man's faith, at the last moments of his life, saves him. It is something that should give all of us comfort and consolation, if only we would get the same opp..

I mentioned at the beginning, that this Feast is relatively new to the Church – but what it represents, is as old as Christianity itself.

A father of the Church, Cyril of Jerusalem, beautifully described how the first Christians received communion, saying that they "made their hands like a throne" to receive the Lord.

This is why the Church asks us to bow our heads as we receive the Eucharist and whenever we hear the holy name of Jesus at Mass or in prayer.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he writes that at the end of time every knee in heaven and earth shall bend at the name of Jesus when he comes in great glory in the final judgment.

At least we can bow our heads upon hearing his name in practice for that awesome day!

The very title "Christ the King" has outlasted most of the world's monarchies. Kings, of course, have fallen out of fashion — there are only about 40 real monarchs now ruling in the world. Most of them are just figureheads.

But the one we honor and celebrate today, of course, isn't.

Paul describes him today: he is the "firstborn of all creation...for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell."

This is the one we celebrate. This is the one we preparing to welcome in a few weeks.

And, this is the one we will greet this morning, with our hands outstretched like a throne.

When I was a teenager, a popular hymn was "The King of Glory."

But I remember the lyrics so well: "The king of glory comes, the nation rejoices, open the gates before him, lift up your voices."

This morning, on this singular feast, this last Sunday of the liturgical year, we open the gates. We lift up our voices. We stretch out our hands.

And when we welcome this King of Glory into our hearts, pray like the good thief:
“Jesus, remember me, when I come before your kingdom. “

Amen!

JMJ

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