

November 24, 2019

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

I've only been here three weeks and already we are at the end of the year, liturgically speaking, of course. Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday as we look forward to a new year next Sunday and the beginning of the season of Advent – the season of anticipation and preparation for Christmas.

But today we celebrate the mystery of Christ's reign as king – of his kingly power. This annual celebration is rather new to the church. It came about in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. The intent was to celebrate that Christ rules the whole world, now and at the end of time.

We live in a world mostly without monarchs. And the ones that exist, such as Queen Elizabeth II, have mostly ceremonial roles. Yet, as we remember studying world history we have an image of kings and queens of the past.

Children read stories and see movies and some want to grow up to be princes and princesses, while some adults wish they had the power of a king or queen. We can all think of the power and privilege of the king. We imagine great palaces, fine clothes, courtesans, jesters and the like.

What is a great deal harder for us to imagine is a king on a cross. But that is the picture before us today in our gospel text. The Jewish authorities knew that they had to make a serious charge against Jesus in order for Pilate to authorize Jesus to be crucified. We know that is exactly what happened. We focus our attention to the details during Lent and Holy Week.

But now, today, we celebrate Christ as King. And we find Jesus on the cross. We see him given mock homage as a king. We see him beaten and scourged. We see him wearing a crown of thorns. We know that he is crucified between two robbers.

We also know that the sign above Jesus' head read – This is the King of the Jews. Even the Jews were not thrilled with this title because they felt that it was as much of a mockery to them as it was to Jesus. We also know that the irony of the sign is that it could not be more true.

Jesus on the cross is difficult for us to view. We read of the physical pain that is suffered by Jesus. We see the scorn of Jews and Romans alike. And we even find that the robbers on either side mock Jesus.

We know crucifixion resulted in a most horrible death. The pain was so bad that those on crosses usually ended up cursing everybody. And the people often cursed back. Observing a crucifixion was not for the faint of heart.

Through all of the happenings at the crucifixion of Jesus, we find something amiss. Jesus was not curing anyone – not the Jews, not the Romans – no one. And furthermore we find that

Jesus forgave them for all that they were doing. Most unusual, indeed. His behavior got the attention of one of the robbers, who somehow put two and two together. He knew that Jesus was innocent of the charges against him as surely as he knew that he and other robber were guilty.

He finally said – “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus affirms the faith of that robber on the cross as he replies – “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

It is evident to us and all who proclaim Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords that Jesus is the King who saves us, who brings us salvation through his dying on the cross and rising again as he foretold.

Jesus associated with sinners. The soldiers at the cross wondered how he could save others when he could not save himself. They did not realize that he did for us what we could not do for ourselves. When his flock is wandering and lost without shepherds, God grieves. But when his flock is being cared for and is growing in relationship with God, God is joyful.

Jesus’ power comes not from earthly power, but from inviting us to become one with him. His power is shown in his service to us and his willingness to accept the punishment we deserve as sinners. And just so, his everlasting kingdom speaks of the realm of salvation where all believers live in an eternal relationship with God.

Jesus is the savior who brings good news to our sin-filled world. Jeremiah referred to this very truth. In our first lesson today we learn that God’s people forgot about the covenant that God made with them. They essentially sold out to earthly desires and expected God to just forget about it. Jeremiah wanted them to remember the covenant. They were faithless, and God was faithful. Jeremiah foretold what Christ would do: heal the sick, gather the lost sheep, restore the faith and rule with righteousness and justice. The oppressed would be restored. Jeremiah was looking to the future.

Each and every one of us needs Jesus. The whole world needs Jesus. Jesus is not only our best hope – he is our only true hope. Jesus is surely the Good Shepherd. And just so, Jesus feeds you and I with God’s word, he washes us of our sins as he died for us.

And now we are called to care for Jesus’ flock by sharing the good news wherever and whenever we can, believing that God will give us the words to say.

Paul reminds us today in our second lesson that Christ is the truth, and as we believe his truth, we will avoid the lies that lead us away from Christ. We will surely receive his power and strength.

Perhaps the question for all of us gathered here this morning is this: Who or what rules our lives? How do we answer that question for ourselves?

When you and I declare Christ as King, we mean that Christ is the most important matter in our lives. Christ the King allows us to live by grace. We are secure enough to take risks and show mercy. Christ's kingdom is a kingdom where forgiveness is given to all who seek it. His is a kingdom based on equality, justice, forgiveness, compassion and love.

In some sense, Christ's kingdom is a mystery. Yet it is a kingdom revealed in Christ's death and resurrection. Thanks to the Holy Spirit his kingdom lives on through us and all believers.

We take great comfort in knowing that Christ is King. We take comfort in knowing that our destiny is in the hands of the one true God who loves us enough to die for us, and in return he asks that we live for him.

As we end our time together today moving through the great texts before us, even the hard to read and hear – Luke's story of the crucifixion, may we leave today understanding that Christ is indeed King of Kings and Lord of Lords, that because he died on the cross our sins are forgiven and that we have the promise of eternal life.

The image of his crown of thorns is replaced by a more appropriate crown – a crown befitting the eternal king who we sang so boldly about as we sang "Crown Him with Many Crowns."

Let us today and always crown him with many crowns, let us crown him the virgin's son, let us crown him the Lord of love, the Lord of life and the Lord of years.

Long live the King. Forever live the King. Thanks be to God. Amen