

First Impressions CHRIST THE KING -C-

2 Samuel 5: 1-3

Psalms 122

Colossians 1: 12-20

Luke 23: 35-43

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

I saw my first Christmas ad on television the day after Halloween. They are rushing the season again and have us thinking about Christmas—mostly about buying and receiving gifts. So, with “Jingle Bells” soon to invade our ears on our car radios and our minds already racing towards Christmas, doesn’t it jar you to hear today’s gospel scene from Jesus’ crucifixion? Today the “King of the Jews” is hanging on the cross suffering the jeers of the worldly powers, the “rulers” and the soldiers who are looking on their tortured and dying victim. Little did they know the truth of that inscription they placed over his head, “The King of the Jews.”

What kind of royal scene is this for the feast of Christ the King, this last Sunday of the liturgical year? The year seems to be ending not with a bang, but with a whimper. The king isn’t ruling from a throne, but from a cross, a place of defeat and abandonment. Do we want to accept his rule in our lives? Do we want this king to have sway over our affections and loyalties? What’s in it for us? Nothing—he’s defeated and on the cross. What’s in it for us? Everything—his death opens the way to a whole new life for us.

The Jews of Jesus’ time were under the brutal rule of King Herod, who was backed by the excessively harsh Roman emperor and his armies. The present looked desperate to them, so they clung to the only things they had---the past and the future. Our first reading from 2 Samuel recalls their great past, personified by King David. Under him God had gathered the twelve tribes into a great nation. This unification happened at Hebron where the tribes recognized David as their king.

Jesus’ contemporaries also looked to the future with the hope that once again God would raise up a king like David and restore the nation and religion to its former greatness. This messiah king would rule over a new and glorious kingdom. How ironic then that, as Luke tells us, an inscription was placed on the cross over Jesus’ head which read, “This is the King of the Jews.” Pilate ordered that inscription placed there, and the insult was not lost on the Jews. Rulers wear gold and bejeweled crowns, while our king has a mocking inscription over his head. Not exactly the kind of king the people were hoping God would send them.

We are a people who admire power. We are quick to react if we think we are being infringed upon in any way. Our country began with a rebellion against a British king’s power. We wanted

our national and individual liberties and would accept no king or queen over us. We boast of being the most powerful nation in the world and we have the economic, military and political might to prove it. Yet today we celebrate Christ the King who identified himself, not with David's kingly rule and grandeur, but with the Suffering Servant depicted in Isaiah. He came, he said, not to rule, but to be the servant of all. He came, not to exert power over people, but to build relationships between them. Those who accept the rule of this king are invited to put aside worldly thoughts of power and dominance and commit themselves to Jesus' rule, which calls them to live guided by the law of love: to forgive enemies, empower the disenfranchised, and welcome the stranger. It is a strange kingdom indeed that Christ came to establish.

This feast challenges us to reflect on the power each of us has and how we use it. Are we first world citizens who are economically comfortable, educated, articulate, etc.? There are many ways we have and use power; many ways we have influence over individuals and as members of communities and organizations. As citizens we also have voice in local and even national policies. In our country political candidates are already vying for our attention as election time draws closer. Our vote is an expression of our power. What values will we voice by our vote? When we choose our candidates during the upcoming primary season we will have to take into consideration the priorities we have as members of Christ the King's dominion. We will have to remember that he was God's servant who ruled, not from a worldly throne, but from the cross.

As individuals and as a nation we also exert power over our natural surroundings; over water, air, animals, fish, birds, etc. We have power over, not only what is above the ground, but what is below as well. When I lived in the coal mining regions of West Virginia I saw massive earthmovers ripping off tops of mountains and dumping the soil into valleys and streams below so they could get at the seams of coal beneath the earth's surface. Land and rivers were polluted, and the lives and health of local people were disrupted by the ravaging of their surroundings. We have enormous power over nature and our growing concern about the environment causes us to reflect on this feast about how we use that power. Are we responsible stewards of the gifts God has given us, or are we irresponsible despots of what we can manipulate for our own use and pleasure?

Those who mocked Jesus expressed the usual understanding of what it means to be favored by God. They say, "Are you not the Christ?" In other words: "Are you not the chosen one God specially anointed to save the people?" They are saying, in effect, that a favored one of God should experience no pain and no death, especially not death on the cross. That is an issue that tempts our own faith. If what Jesus said about God's love for us is true, then why do we and those we love have to suffer? Where is Christ's kingly power for those he has called to be his followers? Why doesn't God exert force and come to the aide of all God's beloved? Why

doesn't God come to the rescue of the ravished creation that the Creator declared "good?"

The dying criminal who reviled Jesus summed it up. "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." If you have power, why not use it to get us out of our suffering and life's harsh predicaments? But Jesus does want to save that criminal and us and so he remains on his "throne" all the way to his death. We don't hear from the other onlookers, those who greeted Jesus at his triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his followers, who would have been in his royal entourage that day. Surely some of them would have been in the crowd that witnessed his execution. Were they asking as we do, "How can this be? How could God's anointed and chosen one be so humiliated and defeated in this way? What kind of King of the Jews do we have anyway?"

What kind of kingly power does Jesus exert from the cross? He certainly can't order the Roman army to come to his rescue. But he does "issue" a decree. He addresses the criminal at his side, the one who acknowledges Christ's innocence and the injustice done against him. (Our tradition has named him Dismas, the Good Thief.) This criminal asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his reign. Jesus, the Shepherd King, the new David, who has described himself as the one who has been sent to find and save the lost, now shepherds this lost sheep on the cross next to him through the gates of Paradise.

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

THE CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE, Edited by Donald Senior: New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Along with the scriptural text of "The New American Bible," this study bible has over 600 pages of study materials written by outstanding Catholic scriptural scholars. There are reading guides to each book as well as overviews of biblical genre, archaeological methods, a glossary and listings of the weekday and Sunday lectionaries.

QUOTABLE

[Concerning the penitent thief] "This episode is recounted only in this gospel. The penitent sinner receives salvation through the crucified Jesus. Jesus' words to the penitent thief reveal that Luke understands that the destiny of the Christian is "to be with Jesus."

----THE CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE, page 142

JUSTICE NOTES

"He is the image of the invisible God"(Colossians 1:15)

On this feast of Christ the King, we are called to abandon our fidelity to "earthly kings" with their powerful armies and messages of fear. We are invited to pledge our loyalty to Jesus, the

image of our all-compassionate God. He is our King, this "image of the invisible God" who ended His life enthroned on a cross.

Jesus' description of His Kingdom was simple: "*I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, naked and you clothed me, sick or in prison and you visited me.*" It is by our own compassion, by reaching out to others and treating them as brothers and sisters, that we reflect the compassion and the love of God that became incarnate in Jesus Christ. ***We are called to build "The Kingdom of God" here on earth,*** a Kingdom which is judged by how the least among us are treated.

The Gospel is not only about our own individual goodness or charity. It is about our responsibility to help change social structures and national policies to make them more compassionate. **We must ask the Gospel questions and struggle to change the answers.**

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." *If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to...

- Christopher Goss #0150949 (On death row since 2/8/05)
- Dane Locklear, Jr. #0245105 (6/14/05)
- Eric Glenn Lane #0667195 (7/11/05)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. CD Available: "FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C." The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and

major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and PDF) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer.

To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the “Year C–CD” button on the left and follow the instructions.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use “First Impressions” in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (FrJude@JudeOP.org)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes “First Impressions” and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. “First Impressions” is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like “First Impressions” sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please go to our webpage to make a secure online donation: <http://preacherexchange.com/donations.htm>

Thank you and “Blessings on your preaching”,
Jude Siciliano, O.P.,
Promoter of Preaching,
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