

Homily – Christ the King

History of Feast and Messiah

This evening we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. This Feast was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to fight growing secularism and atheism in Europe. The Feast declares that Christ is king and thus sovereign over all persons, families, nations and the whole universe. While this feast was instituted in 1925 the roots of the feast go back to the reign of David as king of the tribes of Israel. David was remembered as a powerful king who was faithful to God. After being anointed King over Israel, Nathan the prophet said to David while he was king of the tribes of Israel, “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16)”. David’s son Solomon was the last king to rule over a united kingdom. After Solomon the kingdoms of Israel and Judah was created. The kingdom of Israel was taken into exile by the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century before Christ. The kingdom of Israel ended with the exile. In the 6th century before Christ the kingdom of Judah was taken into exile. While the people later returned to their country the monarchy was not re-established. The people lived through occupation by the Greek and Roman Empires and through this time longed for a powerful king who would both liberate the people from their oppressors and lead them justly.

During over 500 years of occupation the people of Judah looked to the Scriptures as a sign that there would one day be a Messiah who would set them free. They especially looked to the prophecy of Nathan which stated that the kingdom of David would be established forever. They also looked with great hope to prophecies which indicated that God would send a just and powerful king to rule over them.

The word Messiah comes from the Hebrew word for Anointed One. The word *Christos* in Greek means Anointed One as well. In the Ancient world kings, priests and prophets were anointed. The people of the day of Jesus looked forward to the sending of a powerful king, priest or warrior who would set them free.

The disciples of Jesus recognized him as the Messiah whom they awaited. Those who wrote about the life of Jesus described him as the king for whom the Jewish people longed. Jesus is often described in the New Testament as the Son of David, the Messiah and the Shepherd of God’s People. Our spirituality is based on God’s election of Israel and Jesus’ role as the fulfillment of God’s promises.

This Feast celebrates a king who was born in the most humble of surroundings in the stable in Bethlehem. This feast celebrates a king who freely died out of love for all people and a king who is the King of the Universe.

While the disciples longed for a powerful king of majesty, Jesus revealed himself to be a king who would be glorified only after suffering and dying on the cross. The man who the disciples hoped was a Messiah of power and majesty turned out to be a Messiah of self-sacrifice, suffering, forgiveness and healing.

Jesus as King of the Jews

In the Feast of Christ the King we celebrate that Jesus was a king who was willing to suffer and die for us and we celebrate that Christ is the King of the Universe. Jesus Christ is the eternal and transcendent King of the Universe. The Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke each give us a window into just who this king is. In a sense they put a human face to this king. This is especially true in the Gospel of Luke. Luke draws from other sources which were not in the Gospel of Mark, which the original Gospel. The Gospel reading that we have just heard portrays Jesus as king by the manner of his death. The kingship of Jesus is shown in the resolute manner in which he faced his passion and death, the forgiveness of his executioners, the granting of eternal life to the repentant thief and the trust of Jesus before he died. The passion narrative of Luke shows us Jesus as a king who was willing to suffer for us out of his great love. The king who lives in eternal glory is shown in our Gospel reading as a God of self-sacrifice and forgiveness.

The Gospel of Luke gives us a unique perspective into the life of Christ as the Suffering Servant. On the Mount of Olives Jesus is in agony which comes from the Greek word *agonia*. *Agonia* in Greek describes the supreme tension of the athlete covered in sweat before the start of the contest. In the Mount of Olives Jesus prepares himself to begin the passion. Jesus shows a God-given tranquility given to the one who has been given all things and the human tranquility of the one who is innocent as he answers the questions of the Jewish authorities.

Both King Herod and Pontius Pilate witness to the innocence of Jesus. Throughout the passion narrative Jesus is shown to silently accept the suffering that he undergoes. It is clear that Jesus suffers for nothing he's done but instead as a result of the deception of the religious leaders. He does not fight back and yet is in control of his destiny.

The first words of Jesus at the place of the Skull are "forgive them Father for they know not what they do." Only in Luke's Gospel does Jesus forgive his executioners from the cross. Jesus lived out the forgiveness of others that was central to his teaching.

Another event from the cross that is unique to the Gospel of Luke is the promise of paradise to the repentant thief. In the account one criminal reviles Jesus and asks him to come down from the cross. The other criminal recognizes that Jesus is innocent and that Jesus is Messiah. He asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus not only remembered the "good thief" but also promised him heaven.

The kingship of Jesus is finally shown in the way that he passes from this life to Father. Unlike the Gospel of Mark which focuses on the suffering of Jesus, the last words in Luke's Gospel are not words of abandonment but instead words of trust, "Father into your hands I commend my Spirit." Jesus shows himself to be a king who knows that he is in his Father's hands as he dies.

The crucifixion is clearly a moment of God's forgiveness and healing grace through and by Jesus. He shows himself to be a king who is willing to sacrifice for others and who brings salvation through the restoration of God's people through the forgiveness of sins.

Christ the Cosmic King

If the Gospel shows the human side of Jesus' kingdom the second reading from the Book of Colossians shows the divine side of the kingship of Christ. Paul reveals that this king is not only a king who suffered on the cross but that He was present with God from the beginning of time, He brought about salvation through the blood of his cross, He was the first born of the dead, He came to save all creation and He holds all creation together in himself.

Christian spirituality is rooted in the paschal mystery. The reading from Colossians shows Jesus as the one who has reconciled all things to God by "the blood of his cross." The first part of the hymn shows Jesus as the firstborn in the order of creation. It portrays Christ as present at creation and as the "image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Colossians 1 shows that early Christians identified Jesus as Wisdom personified and located Wisdom in the Body of Christ. Christ is both the helper of God in creation but also the one who holds all creation together.

The second part of the hymn describes Jesus as the firstborn in the order of redemption. Christ has been pivotal in God's design for bringing humankind back into right relationship with God. The hymn calls Christ the firstborn of the dead. In Christ the fullness of the divinity dwells and through Christ God has brought about reconciliation on a cosmic scale. The reconciliation that he has effected involves not only humankind but even the whole of creation.

Christ as Our King

The Feast that we celebrate today reminds us that Christ is our King. He is a king of self-sacrifice and love who was willing to die a painful and ignoble death for each of us. He is the image of the invisible God who was present at creation and holds all creation together in himself. We are called to enter the kingdom of this humble and yet powerful king.

Christ the King invites us to share in his kingdom. In our baptism we have become part of Christ's kingdom, and we now belong to Christ the King.

The Feast of Christ the King calls us to live out our baptism. We are called to live out our baptism through being people who live and receive the sacraments, who share our faith with others and who live out love and service.

This Feast calls us to give our entire lives to Christ. An appropriate reflection for us on this Feast is not only what areas of our lives we must give to Christ but also what areas of our lives do we hold back. This Feast calls us to see that Christ must have dominion over our entire lives.

As we celebrate this Feast of Christ the King let us give thanks for having a King of love and forgiveness who is a part of our lives. Let us give thanks for a king who is eternal and not yet to large to personally know and care for us. On this Feast let us be disciples who both allow Christ to have dominion over our lives and who strive to follow him completely.