

Christ the King - C - 2

2 Sam 5:1-3; Col 1:12-20; Lk 23:35-43

We celebrate today the feast of Christ the King also known as the “Solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.” It is a time that the Church asks us to reflect on the reality of the great kingship of Jesus. It might seem strange that the Gospel reading selected for today is the scene of Jesus on the cross. But it is from this point of view that we can know uniquely who our King Jesus is, what his scope of power is, and why he comes to be on a cross crucified.

An interesting clue to the mystery is the sign that Pilate places over Jesus on the cross, we hear: *Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews."* Pilate actually didn't understand the full implications for what he was writing. Through Jesus' trial there were many references to his kingship. He was dressed in royal purple after his scourging and taunted by the guards with a crown of thorns. Jesus and Pilate have a conversation where he flatly asks him if he is king of the Jews. Jesus eludes to his royal status by responding that his kingdom is not of this world. Pilate did not get the full meaning of this, his only frame of reference would be human and earthly kingship - but we know that Jesus was referring to another type of kingship and kingdom. The inscription actually has a deeper meaning than Pilate knew.

To understand this deeper meaning, you have to understand what it means to be the king of the Jews. When God leads the people out of Egypt he makes a covenant with them which is repeated many times in scripture: *You ... shall be my people, and I will be your God.* The people did not have an earthly king in the early days - it was understood that God was their king. The prophets and the Judges were God's messengers to make the laws known (Kings make laws), and to tell the people how to live (Kings set up social structures), and to appoint rulers (Kings validly give power to others to exercise). However, after a time the people wanted an earthly King to be like other people. They had the great privilege of being ruled by the all Holy, all powerful, all good God - but they were not happy. As always humans want it our own way and want to push God to the side. We hear in the book of Samuel: *But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.* The people get their King and a whole line of kings after - and it is largely a disaster. We

heard in the first reading the people's knowledge that there is another great king above the earthly king. In speaking to king David they say: *And the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.'* it was God who picked Saul, and later David, to be king - If God appointed the King, then God is above the earthly kings. Although David takes upon himself the power of appointing other kings, God allows it - but promises that one day God would set a king upon the throne of David whose kingdom will not end. The ultimate "King of Israel" is not the human on the throne, but truly is God Godself - and God promises to install (by his authority) the last, final, and definitive King.

Maybe the thieves crucified with Jesus knew more than Pilate about all of this. One of them says *If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.* Could he have had a sense (or at least a hope) that this was not merely an earthly king - but much more. The other thief rebukes the first for only looking to get out of a sticky situation (that he completely deserved) - he does not dare to ask to be let out of his just punishment, but knowing that Jesus was a king beyond the earth he says: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.* In Jesus we have the God in the flesh - a king who is what the people wanted (a king that is of their own flesh and bone), and yet is also *the* real and true King. This is why he has the authority (as lawgiver, judge, and ruler) to say to the thief: *Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.* He shows a tremendous amount about who this King is from the perspective of the cross. In a manner that no other king would, he sacrifices himself for his people out of his love for them. This is a full picture of who this mighty and loving King really is.

This King Jesus is more than just an awesome and generous human being. We hear of him in the second reading: *He is the image of the invisible God ... all things were created through him and for him ... in him all things hold together. ... For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things ... making peace by the blood of his cross.* Jesus is the true King come to earth, taking flesh for the sake of people, and then dying for them to open the entry into paradise. Due to the peace between heaven and earth gained by the sacrifice of the King Jesus, we have been delivered from darkness and are able to be transferred into his Kingdom. As we prepare to meet Him in the Eucharist today let us look forward to celebrating soon the day that the king is first made known to the world at his birth.