

The King of the Kingdom of God

Christ the King (Year B)

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Jesus talked a lot about the Kingdom of God, but never really defined it. To this day, most Catholics think that the term refers to the Church or heaven. That is not entirely accurate. While there should be some overlap between Church/Kingdom of God and heaven/Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of God is something different.

If we want to know more about the Kingdom of God, or any kingdom for that matter, a good place to start is with the king. Who is the king, what does he look like, and what are his values? Typically, a king is a powerful person who has people subject to his rule. He wears a gold crown and a fine robe. He values authority, loyalty, and wealth. Many Christians have simply transferred all of this onto Jesus in calling him 'Christ the King.' However, as Jesus said in today's Gospel from John, "my kingdom does not belong to this world." Christ the King is much different than the kings of this world. We must not forget that.

As suggested by the selection of today's Gospel passage for the Solemnity of Christ the King, Jesus' kingship, of all places, can be most clearly seen at the crucifixion on Good Friday. As we heard, Pontius Pilate mocked Jesus's kingship by asking him, "then you are a king?" The crowds also mocked Jesus by putting a sign above him abbreviated by the letters INRI, which means 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.' Some went so far as to say don't put that, but only that he claimed, 'I am the King of the Jews.' Lastly, as the ultimate humiliation of his

kingship, they put a crown of thorns on his head. Through all of this, Jesus allowed himself to be powerless, stripped, and empty.

While it is difficult to define the Kingdom of God, Good Friday shows us that Jesus' kingship tells us one thing about it: it takes us beyond appearances. If we are looking for outward appearances of power, privilege, success, and wealth, we are not going to see the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is hidden and moves us beyond appearances. It takes us under appearances to the truth. "For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth," as Jesus said in today's Gospel. If the king looks unsuccessful in the eyes of the world, the truth is that the Kingdom of God is among those who look likewise.

To experience the Kingdom of God, we have to move beyond appearances.

Do I try to see God at work in individuals and in society beyond appearances? Can I see the crucified Christ as Christ the King when I look at a crucifix? Have worldly expressions of kingship distorted my understanding of Christianity?

While still hard to define, the Kingdom of God is bigger than the church and nearer than heaven. As our preface to the Eucharistic Prayer will put it, it is an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace. It is all right here hidden in the powerless, stripped, and empty of this world, if only we could look past appearances.