

November 24, 2019 11:00 a.m. Immaculate Conception, Three Rivers

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King/34th & Last Sunday of Year

**Installation of new Pastor, Fr. Rajain Matthias, MSFS: Immaculate Conception,
Three Rivers; St. Barbara, Colon; St. Clare, Centerville**

Today we celebrate not only this Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe and, hopefully, the King of each of our hearts, as well as the closing of another Church Year; but we also celebrate the formal Installation-Mass of the Pastor of these 3 Parishes which make up the Collaborative here in this northern part of St. Joseph County: St. Clare, St. Barbara and right here at Immaculate Conception.

As you know, this past summer, due to the pastoral needs throughout the Diocese, I asked Father Antony to take on a new pastoral assignment as Pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Kalamazoo, and in turn, I asked Fr. Matthias to become your new pastor here for these 3 parishes. I know that any change in pastoral leadership, especially that of a Pastor, is not easy for anyone, and it requires a time of readjusting, both for the people and the priest. Over these last several months, you've been making those adjustments, and getting to know one another, and I'm very happy that we can Liturgically formalize and celebrate what is already taking place, namely that Fr. Matthias as your new Pastor, and you as the Parishioners of these 3 parishes, are continuing to do what all of us, thru our Baptism, are called to do: to grow in Holiness, and to help continue building the Kingdom of God.

How very appropriate it is, then, that we get to celebrate this Liturgical Installation on the Solemnity of Jesus Christ: our Lord, our Savior, and the King of the Universe. It is Jesus Whom we follow; it is Jesus' Kingdom of justice, love and peace that we help to keep building; and it is the Teachings of Jesus and His Church that we adhere to in our daily lives. That's what every Catholic is called to do, and how we are called to live. Ever since these 3 parishes were established--- Immaculate Conception, 86 years ago (1933), St. Barbara, and St. Clare established in more recent years-----that's what the parishioners/your ancestors, along with their pastors, have done: to follow Jesus Christ, the King of the World and the King of our lives. Jesus has come to establish a Kingdom that is far different than any worldly kingdom, and He is acclaimed as the powerful King of the Universe with a very different understanding of "power" than that of "the world".

What more dramatic way of emphasizing that could there be than thru the Gospel passage we just heard. St. Luke graphically describes the scene of the Crucifixion. Jesus is at His darkest, weakest, and most power-less moment, humanly speaking. He had already been arrested, beaten mercilessly, and forced to carry His own cross to Calvary through the busy streets of Jerusalem, and now He is crucified between two convicted common criminals. His throne?; that same Cross. His only crown?, a Crown of Thorns. He has no luxurious clothing; in fact He has been stripped half naked. He wears no shiny rings or jewelry; instead, His hands and feet are pierced with nails. He appears more *to be conquered* than to be *the Conqueror*.

But that should be no surprise to us. Jesus said many times: *“My Kingdom is not of this world.”* In fact, Jesus’ Kingdom can only take root in the hearts of those of us who choose to be His followers----those who pray with Faith: *“Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.”* That’s why we heard St. Paul writing so beautifully to the Colossians in our Second Reading state that *the Father delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son in Whom we find redemption and forgiveness.*

The “power” of Jesus’ Kingship is not Power as the world defines it; Jesus’ power is that of absolute and unconditional Love. The Son of God set aside His seat at the right Hand of the Father to come among us---to take on our human nature----to be immersed in our human experience----to know the joys AND experience the sorrows of human life from the inside out.

Jesus did not come to condemn us; He did not come to conquer us; He did not come to coerce us into following Him. It’s totally up to us. But whether one chooses to follow Him or not, Jesus has, once and for all, conquered the worst enemies of every human being to ever live: the Devil, and all that flows from him: sin, fear and death.

And so every year, as we conclude one Liturgical Year, and prepare to begin a new one next Sunday with the First Sunday of Advent, we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ is King. But it has to be much more than just some “thing” we believe; it has to be a choice that we make to let Jesus be OUR King---that we make the conscious decision that we will follow Jesus’ example in the way we live our lives.

Today's powerful Gospel passage also gives us some insight into that. Again, let's picture the scene. St. Luke tells us about 3 groups of people: 1) the rulers, 2) the soldiers and 3) the two criminals crucified on either side of Jesus. The rulers "sneered" at Jesus....the soldiers "jeered" at Jesus....one of the criminals "reviled" Jesus.

But then the "hero" of this Scene weighs in----the Good Thief, the only one of all those people that history remembers by name, Dismas. He turns to Jesus, acknowledges His Kingship, and pleads for mercy in those beautiful words: *"Jesus, remember me, when you come into Your Kingdom; Jesus remember me, when You come into Your Kingdom."* And Jesus, in the midst of His awful human suffering, among the very last words Jesus would speak in this world before dying, He promises Dismas: *"Amen, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

My sisters and brothers in Christ, don't we all long to hear Jesus say those words to us? I don't mean that we want to hear Jesus say that to any of us today, or anytime real soon.....but, when it IS our time, isn't that what we want to hear Him say to us?

The way we can be somewhat confident that He will say that to us is if we live our lives doing the best we can, following Jesus as our King. Jesus has given us the way to help us to do that: through the Church, by practicing our Faith, and by receiving the Sacraments. And that's why we need good priests to provide the Sacraments for us, and that's why we need good Pastors.

Father Matthias, as a good Pastor, you are called to be both Shepherd and Fisherman. You are to be a loving and faithful shepherd to those who come to you, and to go out and try to bring back those who got lost along the way; but you are also to "go fishing" with the Good News of Jesus to those who do not know Who He is, and help them to find their way to come to know Him.

And while these two roles are certainly two of Fr. Matthias' primary responsibilities, they are not his alone. Our Baptism calls all of us to be actively engaged in the preaching of the Gospel. The days when the Faithful were just passive recipients are long-gone. Our Baptism calls every one of us to be "missionary disciples" sharing the Good News of Jesus, and to be witnesses to our Faith in every aspect of our lives. "Practicing our Faith" means so much more than coming to Mass/fulfilling our weekly obligation; it means being "*all in*" in the ways we live our Faith, 100% of the time. Your Pastor has his responsibility: to

teach, to sanctify, to lead; to go out searching for the lost; to go fishing for the unchurched. But all of you also have responsibilities. And that means that ALL of us need to be re-energized, and renewed in our Faith.

Just as Jesus extended mercy to Dismas and promised him eternal life, He wants us to know that same love and mercy thru the fervent and regular practice of our Faith, and by following Jesus, our Lord and King.

As we conclude our Liturgical Year with this beautiful Solemnity of Christ the King, and officially launch the next chapters of these 3 parish communities under the leadership of your new Pastor, we pray for God's graces and blessings upon us all. May our dear Blessed Mother, our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, may St. Barbara, and may St. Clare intercede for all of us, asking Jesus, the King, for the gifts of deep Faith, abiding Hope, and sacrificial Love---the Love that even with His final breath on the Cross, breathed forth the assurance of Eternal Life for those who trust in Him. May we all continue our journey of Faith in this world by following Jesus, the King of the Universe and the King of each of our lives, for He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, in this world, and in the World to come. Amen!

God bless you, now and always!