

WHAT GOOD?

For many years, before I returned to the state of my nativity, I lived much of my life in New Jersey. Though innately a New Yorker, and one could argue a Manhattanite, as I was born at Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital between 105th and 106th Street, I cared little for the city. After my parents whisked me away as a tot — like Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt with the infant Christ — to a small suburb near the Jersey shore, it seems I always identified early on as a Jersey boy. (By the logic of Staten Islanders, I could never be a native; only a long-time resident.) I loved living in Jersey throughout school and after. Even when I entered St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, New York (Is there anything more New York than Yonkers?) and found myself afterward stationed in various New York parishes, I found it difficult giving up my NJ driver's license and identity, despite having ever suffered the indignity of questions asking me which Turnpike rest stop was my favorite. I tolerated the pity of know-nothings whose only impression of the Garden State was the Bayway (Exit 16 to Exit 13).

It was Monsignor James Turro, my scripture teacher and a fellow missionary to New York, who helped me find a context to enjoy that special Jersey goodness I proudly laid claim to. When he

learned that, like him, I also hailed from the much maligned state, he put things into context for me: "Oh, so you are a Galilean."

Monsignor Turro's remark made me mindful of the words of Nathaniel (in the Gospel of John) when Philip told him that they had found the one who Moses

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and the prophets had spoken about, Jesus of Nazareth. His skeptical response: "Nazareth? What good can come from Nazareth?"

I suppose that many of us have wondered whether we, had we seen the miracles, heard the words spoken with authority, and stood in his presence, might have answered Nathaniel with the reply, "Why, he's the Messiah, of course." Cast against all the facts of his life was the crucifixion, a source of scandal. Scandal which provided ample reason to walk away and forget all he taught. Our

Lord's passion and death did cause scandal, for even his closest friends lost faith and left him (Luke 24:13 ff). Understandably, his rising from the dead restored their faith and ended the doubt.

If we benefit from the hindsight of nearly 2000 years of Church teaching in acknowledging Jesus to be the Son of God, the Savior of the world, we are often prone, I fear, to regard the fullness of the Christ event (from his conception in the womb of Our Lady to his Ascension) with some skepticism. Not that we don't believe it. Rather, we don't allow it to impact our lives as much as it should. Sometimes it seems as if we reserve the good that comes from Nazareth for some far-off future occasion. The actual demands of claiming Christ to be your king can be daunting. It means loving God with all of your heart, mind, body, and soul. It means loving your neighbor as yourself. It means being perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. It means taking up your cross and following Jesus.

Today's solemnity of Christ the King challenges us to meditate on our profession that he is the Messiah, the One spoken of by Moses and the Prophets, whose deliverance from death frees us from its shadow and allows us to live in the light of the most astounding news to be announced in all of history.