

CHRIST THE KING, Cycle B

As Americans, I think we struggle with the idea of a Monarchy. It runs against the grain of our rugged American individualism. After all, our emancipation as a nation was won by throwing off the shackles of King George the III.

Today we equate modern Monarchies with what we see in the United Kingdom, where the Queen is really not much more than a figure-head, primarily perfunctory, but at the same time essential to the English way of life. We are far more comfortable with that image.

But being a monarch, a king, really meant something in Jesus' day. A king was the most powerful human being on earth. A king speaks, common people tremble.

For nations, the king was the only means of securing order and peace. The king was, civilization and domestic tranquility personified. He was to be honored and respected and served. He was to be revered and feared and obeyed.

A king was everything and everybody rolled up into one.

He was of utmost importance – so-much-so that even time was calculated on the basis of when the King began his reign.

In the fifth year of the reign of Julius Caesar,

In the twenty-fifth year of the reign of King David.

Even the now politically incorrect use of Anno Domini. AD. In the year of our Lord.

(Longer Pause)

(Pause)

King imagery is even more problematic today, not only because of our societies widespread suspicion of hierarchy and masculine dominance, not only because it offends our Democratic sensibilities.... But because we are also not likely to be drawn to chivalrous virtues. Notions like honor, obedience, duty, and loyalty irritate anyone whose highest value is individualism. We love our autonomy. We celebrate choice because it is ours. Doing the will of someone else is another matter.

Service.

To serve.

Servant.

Servitude.

The words insinuate dominance:

Dominion.

Dominus.

Lord.

(PAUSE)

John's gospel, more than the other three, develops the theme of Jesus' kingship. This is especially evident in John's account of the passion. Fully one third of the passion recounts the encounter between Jesus and Pilate.

Once he hands Jesus over to be crucified, Pilate has the charge against Jesus—"King of the Jews"—published in three languages, Greek, the common language of the world, Latin, the official language of the Roman Empire, and Aramaic, the language of the region.

And so today, we celebrate that same universal kingship that Jesus claimed in today's Gospel and that was unwittingly verified by Pilate himself.

(Pause)

But I need to ask, what type of a Kingship do we celebrate?

Is it universal? Yes. Jesus' lordship of the entire Universe, even if not accepted or acknowledged by all peoples (even some Christians) is not dependent on any ones beliefs or acknowledgements. It is truth. Jesus came to testify to the truth.

Do we celebrate a kingship that requires things of us? Yes, we do.

Jesus' kingdom is not something that is in the sky by and by. It is real, it is present, and it makes demands upon us.

Jesus calls us to obedience, faith, and love here and now. It is our sacred duty and our call to holiness.

(Pause)

Jesus is a King like no other.

Remember, that while Jesus calls us to action, He does not force or compel us.

He calls us to **allow** God to enter into our lives and to *rule our lives*. He **invites** us to walk by the light he himself has shed. He **shows** us in his own person and in the lives of those who follow him that when we turn to him that there is healing and wholeness to be found.

(PAUSE) (Theme shift)

Jesus says that his kingdom is not of this world. It is a kingdom not fought for with old means of warfare. Rather, it testifies to truth. It will not kill for the truth, it will die for it.

If Jesus is king, he will be a suffering king.

He will not demand ransom. He will be ransom.

He will win, not by spilling the blood of others, but by offering up his own.

For Jesus, the power of his kingship will be revealed in an unexpected way: **"No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again" (10:18).**

The exercise of that power reaches its climax on the cross: **"when I am lifted up from the earth. I will draw everyone to myself" (12:32).** Jesus uses his power and authority to accomplish the salvation of all humanity.

(Pause)

The lord of history who stands before the throne of God, stands as lamb that has been slaughtered.

This is a strange king, to be sure.

Over the centuries even we Christians have had trouble with this new, this different kind of king, so-much-so we have hungered for the earthly assurances of conquest and control.

But it is equally true that the centuries have seen men and women who recognized in Jesus a kingliness that summoned **nothing less** than the loyalty of a **free human heart**.

Something was unlocked in them when they discovered a "lord of life" whose ambition was not to **dominate** humanity but to **save and serve** it. When they understood what it meant to be a subject, or servant of the King of Kings.

Was that always an easy task? Read the stories of our Saints and you will see that it was not easy at all, but they succeeded, by the **graces that flow from His Royal Throne**.

My sisters and brothers, we, too are a part of that same Kingdom; we entered its gates through the grace-filled waters of Baptism. We are fed each Sunday at the King's Banquet, who **is** the King **himself**.

We too are called to loyalty to that same King, a loyalty given out of love.

We are called and enabled, just as they were, to be His Humble subjects, so that by our actions, and by our love, we make present to all of humanity the kingdom of God. To what end? That they, too, may know and love our King.