

The Last Sunday after Pentecost:
Christ the King
November 23, 2014
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The King of Love

“*My Kingship is not of this world...*” So Jesus answers Pilate who asks, “*Are you the King of the Jews?*” (John 18:33f). Each of the Gospels shows us a unique understanding of Christ the King. From John we know about Pilate’s interrogation shortly before he agreed to have Jesus crucified as a political criminal – a threat to Caesar. Jesus, according to John, is a spiritual, a sacramental King. To know Jesus as King is to know that he is the way, the truth, the life.

St. Luke shows us Christ the King through the eyes of the penitent thief who, hanging from a cross right next to Jesus, begs him saying, “*Remember me when you come into your kingdom.*” (23:42). There are two dying men. Yet one knows Jesus is the Son of God, the King who can heal, free, unite.

Mark has the simplest, most straightforward narrative of Christ the King as he tells us about the reaction of the crowd when Jesus enters Jerusalem, the event we commemorate every Palm Sunday, “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the Kingdom of David...Hosanna in the highest...*” (11:9, 10)

And, as we have just heard in today’s Gospel, Matthew knows Christ the King at the end of all time, judging all creation. Christ’s Kingdom will ultimately prevail over all other kingdoms, including those worldly kingdoms built upon evil and death. Satan will be defeated. The righteous, those who have cared for the needy, those who have loved God and loved their neighbor, will enjoy everlasting communion with the God of love; they will know eternal life.

Our first concern today is to ask how is Christ our King? Most of us are unfamiliar with the reality of being under the rule of a King. But this day asks us to reflect upon how does Jesus rule in our life? How are we obedient to his teaching, his authority?

- Do we follow his rule of love?
- Do we care for the needy?
- Do we have hope for eternity?
- Are we free from sin and all oppression?
- Do we celebrate unity with all God’s creation?

Christ the King has been celebrated in art and music through the centuries. Art and music balance the Gospel imperatives, which can often seem overwhelming. For three weeks now we have heard the last teachings from Jesus according to Matthew.

1. Be ready, be prepared...you never know when God is coming into your life in a powerful way.
2. Use your gifts, your talents. Work hard for God who gives you everything.
3. Care for the needy. You will meet Jesus as you help his people.

There are two hymns that help me know Christ the King. We sing them at the choral services today. For me they connect the theological, the Christological, the thinking about Christ the King with our actual experience, especially on this day when we think about the end of time, since this Sunday is the last Sunday in the liturgical year. The new year in the Church's calendar begins next week as we celebrate the start of Advent. So as we acknowledge Christ the King, we also come to the end – at least of the Church's year. Often the Church reflects upon the four last things: Heaven, Hell, Death, Judgment.

Both of these hymns were written by parish priests in the Church of England. Henry Baker, author of hymn 645, "The King of love my shepherd is," lived in the 19th century and was highly influenced by the high church Oxford Movement. As he lay dying his last words were from the hymn he had written some 9 years earlier, "perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love he sought me, and on his shoulder gently laid, and home, rejoicing brought me."

George Herbert, author of hymn 382, "King of glory, King of peace," lived in early 17th century England. He was an outstanding writer and devoted to his parish ministry. He knew the famous words of St. Athanasius, "Christ was made man that we might be made God..." or as the Priest prays when pouring the water into the wine at the offertory, "May this water and wine be so joined to remind us that Christ humbled himself to take on our humanity that we by his grace might share in his Divinity..."

Christ is our King as we allow him to shower his love and grace upon us. And because we know how loved we are, we are able to love others. Be ready, life is short, use your talents, God wants our help. Help the needy, you will know Christ. There is, and always will be, only one true King, only one everlasting Kingdom. Christ is the King of love, the king of glory, the King of peace.

Ezekiel 34:11-16

Psalm 100

Ephesians 1:15-23

Matthew 25:31-46